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AFFECTIVE LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES FOR GIFTED ADOLESCENTS

A Doctoral Research Project

Presented to

the Morgridge College of Education

University of Denver

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

by

Jessica Anne Howard

June 2017

Advisors: Norma Lu Hafenstein, Ph.D. & Paul Michalec, Ph.D.

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Title: AFFECTIVE LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES FOR GIFTED
ADOLESCENTS

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Abstract

The importance of teaching children and adolescents about affective content has recently become more of a priority in the realm of education, especially when working with gifted learners. The Colorado Department of Education requires that students on Advanced Learning Plans (ALPs) write an annual academic and affective goal. The problem of practice guiding this research is the lack of services and support for gifted adolescents to achieve healthy affective development and to write affective goals. It appears that opportunities for students, especially secondary students, to learn about affective content are limited. This multiple case study examined factors contributing to gifted adolescents' understanding of affective concepts. Through the use of data including teacher interviews, artifacts of the school environment, and curricular affective resources, this study shows that affective learning opportunities for gifted adolescents are limited in the cases studied. Lack of time for instruction, adults' lack of understanding of gifted affective needs, and lack of curricular resources were all contributing factors to this problem of practice. Although this study cannot be generalized to all secondary schools, the findings have important implications with regard to instructional practices as they relate to affective instruction for gifted adolescents.

Keywords: affective, gifted, adolescent, social-emotional, goals, asynchrony,

overexcitability

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“I hope you never fear those mountains in the distance

Never settle for the path of least resistance

Living might mean taking chances, but they're worth taking

Loving might be a mistake, but it's worth making

And when you get the choice to sit it out or dance

I hope you dance...”

-Lee Ann Womack

The support of my family, friends, cohort, and professors through this journey has been tremendous. It has helped me grow in ways I didn’t know were possible.

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Chapter One: Introduction

"Go confidently in the direction of your dreams & live the life you imagined"

~Thoreau

Research Topic

“Affective education encourages students to become more involved in their personal growth, development, and fulfillment” (Johnson, 2001, p. 18). My research examined factors contributing to gifted adolescents’ understanding of affective content related to their lives and their affective goal setting, as well as how affective instruction is employed in the school setting. According to Goleman (2006),

People with well-developed emotional skills are also more likely to be content and effective in their lives, mastering the habits of mind that foster their own productivity; people who cannot marshal some control over their emotional life fight inner battles that sabotage their ability for focused work and clear thought. (p. 36)

The problem of practice guiding this research is the lack of services and support for gifted adolescents to learn about affective content and set affective goals. The Colorado Department of Education requires that students on Advanced Learning Plans (ALPs) write annual academic and affective goals. According to educators around the state, it appears that opportunities for students, especially secondary students, to learn about affective topics are limited. Many factors contribute to the challenges of teaching how to set affective goals to gifted adolescents, predominantly the lack of time and

scheduling difficulties (Peterson, 2003; Tetreault, Haase, & Duncan, 2016). Since the affective goal setting process is mandated in the State of Colorado (Colorado Department of Education, Office of Gifted Education, n.d.), this research examined the extent to which gifted adolescents are assisted in setting such goals. Gifted adolescents need to understand what affective content is before they can set affective goals. I examined three aspects of school climate to see how and to what degree secondary schools are exposing gifted adolescents to affective content in order to assist them with the mandated affective goal-setting process.

In my former role as a Gifted and Talented Resource Teacher, one of my duties included assisting teachers as they helped their students create Advanced Learning Plan (ALP) goals. I often heard concerns from secondary teachers and counselors regarding the lack of understanding by their gifted students regarding affective content. These concerns included the perception that students are asked to create a goal without prior knowledge regarding affective content, which makes the goal not only difficult to develop, but in most cases meaningless. Affective learning opportunities appear to be missing from the school curriculum or taught in a piecemeal fashion at the secondary level. As the Gifted and Talented Resource Teacher, secondary teachers would contact me on a regular basis, frustrated because the only resources they could find for affective instruction for the gifted adolescents required the use of more classroom time than they could carve out in their schedule. Teachers at one middle school I worked with offered lunch groups and projects throughout the year, but still struggled to cover enough content

with their students prior to the writing of affective goals in October. The result of a lack of affective instruction is a lack of gifted students' ability to understand and set affective goals.

Implementation of affective learning opportunities appears to vary greatly depending on the school. In my previous position, I was fortunate to work with approximately twelve different schools each year. This experience allowed me to spend time in multiple schools each year and work with teachers to understand what resources were available to them. The teachers were comfortable working with the creation of academic goals and supporting the academic needs of their students, but when it came to affective goals and needs of their gifted students, they noted that it was a struggle to support them or find appropriate resources.

The Colorado Department of Education requires that all students with an ALP create and progress monitor both an academic and an affective goal (Colorado Department of Education, 2016). Research shows that there are opportunities for teachers, gifted elementary students and parents of gifted elementary students to learn about affective content and to engage in learning opportunities, but it appears more limited for gifted adolescents in secondary schools (Cross, 2011; Galbraith & Delisle, 2015; VanTassel-Baska, Cross, & Olenchak, 2009; Fonseca, 2011). There does not appear to be a systematic platform to assist gifted adolescents in building foundational capacity in the area of affective learning, for instance, a group that would meet on a regular basis (Peterson, 2015). This is a significant problem because gifted learners have

unique affective needs that should be addressed. Many gifted students exhibit asynchronous development. Silverman (2013) describes asynchronous development as the discrepancy between cognitive development and affective development: “Advanced cognitive abilities and heightened intensity combine to create inner experiences and awareness that are qualitatively different from the norm. This asynchrony increases with higher intellectual capacity” (p. 44).

Daniels and Piechowski (2009) explained that gifted children have ...exceptional ways of experiencing the world – qualitatively, quantitatively, or often both. Being acutely aware of both their physical environment and their emotional life, gifted children tend to be more intense, more sensitive, and more prone to experiencing emotional extremes – whether exuberance or despair. (p. 33)

Asynchronous development plays a key role in the lives of gifted adolescents. Daniels and Piechowski (2009) offer this insight on the importance of acknowledging asynchrony in gifted adolescents:

This difference in the rate and degree of physical maturation impinges all other aspects of growth and development. And while this is true for all teenagers, it is especially true for the gifted. There may be immense discrepancies in how aspects of the gifted child’s core potential are expressed. A gifted child may have the cognitive capability of a person many years older – enclosed in an exceptional, typical, or delayed physical development and augmented by exceptional, average,

or stunned social/emotional functioning. This enormous variance and asynchrony of function can feel overwhelming for the sensitive and intense gifted adolescent. (p. 61)

It is important for educators, parents and gifted adolescents to be cognizant of the role asynchrony and overexcitabilities play in the lives of gifted students. Behaviors that correlate with asynchrony and overexcitabilities can be construed incorrectly if teachers or other educators do not understand the underlying reason for such behaviors. As Goleman (2017) observes:

If your emotional abilities aren't in hand, if you don't have self-awareness, if you are not able to manage your distressing emotions, if you can't have empathy and have effective relationships, then no matter how smart you are, you are not going to get very far (p. 1).

Researchers and educators have found that it is imperative to teach social and emotional skills in an explicit manner (Comallie-Caplan, L., 2013; Galbraith, J. & Delisle, J. R., 2011; Smutney, J. F., 1999) so that students have a strong social and emotional foundation as they move through their education and into a professional career. For example, Harris Educational Research Council conducted a survey of American employers, which showed that 40% of employees are not able to work cooperatively with fellow coworkers (as cited in Johnson, 2001, p.16). In *Developing Leadership Potential in Gifted Students* (2010), Bean explains:

When students understand that there is a continual interaction between what they think and what they feel, they can take better control of both. This realization will help students grasp that emotions influence both thinking and behavior and all of these interactions influence one's leadership potential. (p.11).

In *The Gifted Teen Survival Guide* (Galbraith, J. & DeLisle, J.R., 2011) the authors note that essential skills needed in the 21st century job market will include adaptability, self-direction, cross-cultural skills, leadership, and accountability. Young adults will need to have a strong handle on social skills to become effective leaders. The Center for Creative Leadership found that “75 percent of careers are derailed for reasons related to emotional competencies, including inability to handle interpersonal problems; unsatisfactory team leadership during times of difficulty or conflict; or inability to adapt to change or elicit trust” (Center for Creative Leadership, 2017). Concurring with this sentiment, Goleman (2017) noted that in a “high-IQ job pool, soft skills like discipline, drive, and empathy mark those who emerge as outstanding.”

Silverman (2013) made an important point regarding leadership skills and dispositions in her book, *Giftedness 101*. She asserted that “Leadership is not just the charisma to lead groups; it also occurs in more solitary forms in scientific breakthroughs, the creation of philosophy, and the writing of profound works” (Silverman, 2013, p. 152). During a speech to gifted students at the School of Mines, an executive at an aerospace company expressed concern that many of his best engineers struggled with leadership tasks. He worried that these gifted individuals were not being supported in the affective

areas that promote leadership ability. This concern emphasizes the importance of supporting all aspects of the gifted learner. In addition, Bean (2010) described a study conducted in 2007 by researchers at the Center for Creative Leadership. Two hundred and forty-seven senior executives were asked about leadership trends. The data showed that “Patterns that emerged focused on talent, innovation, collaboration, and globalization” (p. 11). Bean (2010) concluded that:

These trends must be integrated into instruction in meaningful ways and educators must recognize the link between leadership and emotional intelligence. Key leadership skills and perspectives are related to one’s interpersonal skills (skills in building and maintaining relationships with others). Students should be guided to discover the powerful role that emotions play in their life as well as the role that critical thinking plays in the emotions they experience. (p. 11)

Finally, metacognition plays a key role in affective learning and leadership. Sterner (2012) stated that “So few people are really aware of their thoughts. Their minds run all over the place without their permission, and they go along for the ride unknowingly and without making a choice” (p. 9). In order for gifted adolescents to have the ability to decide on an affective goal that relates to them and then write about it, they must be aware of all aspects of their academic, social, and emotional needs.

Research Questions

The overarching research question was: how do secondary schools incorporate affective learning opportunities for gifted adolescents? The sub-questions were:

1. What environmental factors are present to support/deter healthy affective development?
2. What curricular factors are present to support healthy affective development?
3. How do educators support/dissuade healthy affective support?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research was to examine factors contributing to gifted adolescents' understanding of affective issues. The Colorado Department of Education has revised their gifted education guidelines to include an affective goal component because of the importance of balancing academic support with social emotional support (CDE, 2016). Every student placed on an ALP is required to have an academic as well as an affective goal. This requirement should strengthen the systemic process of supporting affective growth. It will also aid in teaching metacognitive skills related to affective issues of gifted learners.

The theoretical framework for this study was supported by Lev Vygotsky's Theory of Cognitive Development, which can be useful when discussing affective learning and affective goal setting. Vygotsky argued that students have a zone of proximal development (ZPD) which is "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p.86). Mariana Hedegaard states that, "the underlying assumption behind the concept [zone of proximal

development] is that psychological development and instruction are socially embedded; to understand them one must analyze the surrounding society and its social relations” (Daniels, 1996, p. 169). To have students learn within this zone, teachers must scaffold learning opportunities to engage the student in challenging, yet achievable situations. After analyzing the data, it became clear that Vygotsky’s Constructivist Learning Theory and the zone of proximal development (ZPD) was a useful framework to discuss the emergent themes and recommendations for future research.

This case study examined four secondary school settings to assess what opportunities are available that contribute to gifted adolescents’ understanding of affective development and goal setting. The research was conducted within secondary schools because there are few studies regarding affective content for gifted adolescents in middle and high schools. I chose these schools after assessing their websites and mission statements, with the objective of finding schools that appeared to primarily support academic objectives and those that appeared to primarily support affective objectives, for the purpose of comparison. Accordingly, two schools that provided evidence of strong academic objectives on their website and mission statement and two schools that provided support for affective objectives on their website and mission statement were selected. It was my hope that schools expressing a strong affective objective would be more open to the affective needs of gifted adolescents, therefore offering more guidance for healthy affective development as well as affective goal setting. I wanted to see if there was a contrast with schools that expressed a strong academic objective. I wondered if

having an academic focus would deter from offering affective support, especially to the gifted adolescents.

I observed school sites to ascertain how environmental factors, such as posters and classroom setup, support or deter healthy affective development through an artifact analysis. Observations occurred during the fall semester. I also analyzed affective curriculum and/or learning opportunities that were offered at the four schools. Finally, I interviewed the gifted teachers at each school to learn how educators in the selected schools support or dissuade healthy affective development.

Definitions of Terms

Advanced Learning Plan. The Advanced Learning Plan (ALP) is a legal document [22-20-R-12.00, C.R.S.] outlining programming for identified gifted students and is used as a guide for educational planning and decision-making (<https://www.cde.state.co.us/gt/alp>).

Affective content. In this research, affective content includes the following; perfectionism, anxiety, depression, intensity, overexcitabilities/sensitivities, resiliency, stress, leadership, and emotional awareness related to relationships and communication.

Affective development. Affective is defined as relating to, arising from, or influencing feelings or emotions (Merriam-Webster, 2016). Affective development pertains to the emergence of the emotional capacity to experience, recognize, and express a range of emotions and to adequately respond to emotional cues in others. Emotions such as happiness or fear are defined as subjective reactions to experiences that are

associated with physiological and behavioral changes. “Emotional functioning compromises several aspects, including the inducement and elicitation of internal physiological states, the physiological pathways that mediate these internal states, the emotional expressions, and the perception of affect” (Volkmar, F., 2013, p. 75).

Asynchronous development. Asynchrony is the term used to describe the mismatch between cognitive, emotional, and physical development of gifted individuals. Gifted children often have significant variations within themselves and develop unevenly across skill levels. For example, a gifted child may be excellent in math, but poor in reading--or vice versa. Often, intellectual skills are quite advanced, but fine motor or social skills are lagging. Experts do not completely agree, but because asynchrony is so prominent in gifted children, some professionals believe asynchronous development rather than potential or ability, is the defining characteristic of giftedness (Morelock & Webb et al., as cited on NAGC.org).

Cluster grouping. Cluster grouping is [when] identified gifted students at a grade level are assigned to one classroom with a teacher who has special training in how to teach gifted students. The other students in their assigned class are of mixed ability. Differentiated instructional opportunities allow gifted students to interact with their intellectual as well as their age peers. Through cluster grouping the intellectual, social, and emotional needs of the gifted students can be addressed (Schuler, P., 1997).

Community partner. A community partner is a community or public organization that assists in research. The community partner for this research is a rural

school district in Colorado. In collaboration with the community partner, information regarding factors that contribute to the affective learning were compiled.

Giftedness. There are many definitions of giftedness, but to understand the unique academic and affective needs of gifted adolescents, two definitions served as the foundation for this work. The first definition, utilized by the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) states:

Gifted individuals are those who demonstrate outstanding levels of aptitude (defined as an exceptional ability to reason and learn) or competence (documented performance or achievement in top 10% or rarer) in one or more domains. Domains include any structured area of activity with its own symbol system (e.g., mathematics, music, language) and/or set of sensorimotor skills (e.g., painting, dance, sports). (National Association of Gifted Children, n.d.)

The second definition was developed by the Columbus Group in 1990 and emphasizes the affective aspects of gifted individuals and needs to be taken into consideration. This group was made up of prominent members of the gifted community (Neville, et al., 2013). The Columbus Group definition plays a critical role in understanding the importance of providing social and emotional learning opportunities to gifted individuals. The Columbus Group definition states:

Giftedness is asynchronous development in which advanced cognitive abilities and heightened intensity combine to create inner experiences and awareness that are qualitatively different from the norm. This asynchrony increases with higher

intellectual capacity. The uniqueness of the gifted renders them particularly vulnerable and requires modifications in parenting, teaching, and counseling in order for them to develop optimally. (Tetreault et al., 2016, p. 5)

Both definitions are important to this study for different reasons. The NAGC study aligns with the definition that the Colorado Department of Education (as well as most districts in the state) uses to guide its work in gifted education. It involves the cognitive aspects of giftedness as well as other talent areas, but does not address the psychological aspects of giftedness. In the book, *Off the Charts – Asynchrony and the Gifted Child* (2013), Tolan and Piechowski state that “As children move toward adulthood, stress on high achievement leaves out of consideration their emotional development, just as it is left out of the picture almost everywhere else” (p. 3). Since the Colorado Department of Education requires that students with Advanced Learning Plans (ALPs) write an annual affective goal, I felt that an additional definition that encompassed the social and emotional needs of gifted learners was necessary. The idea of asynchronous development is one of the main arguments for gifted learners needing to receive specific affective learning opportunities.

Metacognition. The awareness or analysis of one's own learning or thinking processes. Research on metacognition...has demonstrated the value of monitoring one's own cognitive processes (Metacognition, 2017). “Self-awareness is the first element of emotional intelligence, or EQ” (Bean, 2010, p. 13). Metacognition, self-awareness and affective content are intertwined. In order for gifted adolescents to understand affective

content that affects them personally and write meaningful goals, they must be self-aware, which means they need to be metacognitive.

Progress monitoring. Progress monitoring is used to assess students' performance, to quantify a student rate of improvement or responsiveness to instruction, and to evaluate the effectiveness of instruction. Progress monitoring can be implemented with individual students or an entire class. In progress monitoring, attention should focus on fidelity of implementation and selection of evidence-based tools, with consideration for cultural and linguistic responsiveness and recognition of student strengths (Rti4success, 2017).

Assumptions

It is assumed that schools with a strong affective presence on their website and in their mission statement will have more opportunities for gifted adolescents to learn about affective content. It could also be assumed that schools with strong academic presence and less affective presence may not have as many opportunities for gifted adolescents to learn about affective content.

Conclusion

In this chapter, the study problem was presented, which is that resources to assist gifted secondary school students in learning about affective content and setting affective goals, as mandated by the CDE, are lacking. A background of the problem, as well as an explanation of the theoretical framework to be used in the study were given. A brief

overview of the study's setting and population was explained. Definitions to be used in the study were explained.

Chapter Two will provide an overview of relevant literature as it relates to the study problem in practice. It will also show the requirements from the State of Colorado regarding affective ALP goal construction and implementation.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

Every student with an Advanced Learning Plan (ALP) in the State of Colorado must create an academic and affective goal to work on throughout the school year. Through informal conversations with directors of gifted education in Colorado, it was determined that many students struggle to find meaning in the task of creating an affective goal due to a lack of support and services focusing directly on affective content.

This case study examined the support that gifted adolescents receive in the area of affective learning, in order learn about affective content and to set affective goals for themselves, in accordance with CDE mandates. An examination of current resources available for gifted adolescents related to affective content suggests that structured programs and resources, such as scheduled discussion groups, may be required for effective affective instruction (Peterson, 2008; VanTassel-Baska et al., 2009). Teaching affective content in depth may require discussion groups and other collaborative methods but logistically, this creates an issue regarding scheduling, as teachers' and students' time is limited and teaching affective content has to be added to other existing academic instruction (Peterson, 2015). Many factors contribute to the limitations of teaching affective issues to gifted adolescents, most predominantly the lack of time and scheduling difficulties (Peterson, 2003; Tetreault, Haase, & Duncan, 2016). Since the affective goal setting process is mandated in the State of Colorado (Colorado Department of Education,

Office of Gifted Education, n.d.), this research examined how the schools studied provided, or failed to provide, adequate affective learning opportunities. Given the stated problems of doing so, it was a goal of the research to discover if those schools that expressed a focus on affective goals for their students (as determined by the researcher's examinations) did a better, worse, or equal job of providing such opportunities compared to their counterparts that expressed a focus on academic goals.

There is abundant research regarding affective curricula and resources for elementary age students, but easy-to-access proactive affective programs for adolescents are limited (Peterson, 2003; VanTassel-Baska, Cross, & Olenchak, 2009). The need for adolescents to understand social and emotional issues is also well documented, but there appears to be a gap between this understanding and practical methods for educating adolescents regarding these issues (Cross, 2011; Galbraith & Delisle, 2011; Galbraith & Delisle, 2015; Peterson, 2003; Webb, 2013). Organizations such as the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) and the Social and Emotional Needs of the Gifted (SENG) are raising awareness for the need for social and emotional learning, but consistent programs for gifted adolescents are still limited and depend on individual school and teacher involvement. Many of the strategies for gifted adolescents found in the current literature are aimed toward parent- or student-initiated, individual learning (Galbraith & Delisle, 2011; 2015). There is a corresponding lack of literature on programs and strategies for affective learning at the institutional level. This lack informs the purpose of the current study.

The literature review in this chapter examined multiple aspects of social and emotional learning and goal setting. Themes that emerged include: (1) understanding the unique affective needs of gifted adolescents, (2) history of affective learning, (3) aspects of neuroscience and technology related to gifted adolescents, (4) affective curriculum and (5) goal setting and affective learning opportunities within the secondary school setting. The overarching purpose of this study is to find out how schools assist gifted adolescents in acquiring learning associated with affective content prior to the creation of affective Advanced Learning Plan (ALP) goals.

Understanding the Unique Needs of Gifted Adolescents

Adolescence is “associated with significant biological and physical changes, a growing need for independence, academic and employment pressures and fluctuating social relationships” (Ahmed, et al., 2015, p. 12). Adolescents struggle with self-regulation and emotional reactivity, which can result in anxiety and stress related disorders (Ahmed et al., 2015). For a gifted adolescent, the emotions can be more intensified and consequently more difficult to control (Daniels & Piechowski, 2009).

These emotional issues have been the subject of recent theory. In his Theory of Psychosocial Development, Erik Erikson believed that adolescents go through a process of “trying on different hats” as they develop a sense of self through interactions with people (Cross, 2011, p. 31). For gifted adolescents that can be difficult because they often have the ability to cognitively understand issues ahead of their chronological age, but they might not be able to deal with the emotional ramifications of situation even as well

as their age peers. This is known as asynchronous development and can create frustration and confusion for gifted adolescents (Neville et al., 2013).

This asynchronous development is due in part because gifted adolescents tend to be independent. Donna Wilson (2014) believed that “Students who succeed academically often rely on being able to think effectively and independently in order to take charge of their learning” (p. 1). Being metacognitive, able to think about one’s thoughts to deepen understanding, allows students to take charge of their learning, which is imperative when discussing topics that can be extremely personal.

In addition, gifted individuals sometimes exhibit intense reactions to situations. These overexcitabilities are defined as “an innate tendency to respond in an intensified manner to various forms of stimuli, both external and internal” (Daniels & Piechowski, 2009, p. 8). The work of Dabrowski, a Polish psychiatrist and psychologist, helped pave the way for researchers to examine intense behaviors found in gifted individuals. Individuals with overexcitabilities have a “stronger reaction than normal for a longer period of time to a stimulus that may be small or imperceptible to others” (Tetreault et al., 2016, p. 6). Dabrowski developed the “Theory of Positive Disintegration.” This theory led to the understanding of five overexcitabilities (OEs), including psychomotor, sensual, imaginal, intellectual and emotional (Silverman, L., 2000). In 1962, while Dabrowski was studying a group of gifted youth, he “found that every one of them showed considerable manifestations of the overexcitabilities” (Silverman, L., 2000, p.13).

Dabrowski's idea of overexcitabilities aligns with the gifted strength areas outlined by the Colorado Department of Education. Understanding that students with strengths in one of these areas may also deal with overexcitabilities in that area will help teachers and counselors understand how to support student affective learning. The presumption that gifted adolescents will show some manifestation of overexcitabilities and intensity in the affective realm is a central reason behind this study. The need for gifted adolescents to stay within their ZPD regarding affective areas, especially as they show overexcitabilities, is imperative.

In support of Dabrowski's theory relating to gifted students, Lind (2012) found that "a small amount of definitive research and a great deal of naturalistic observation have led to the belief that intensity, sensitivity, and overexcitability are primary characteristics of the highly gifted" (p. 336). Lind (2012) explained that:

Overexcitabilities are inborn intensities indicating a heightened ability to respond to stimuli. This characteristic is found to a greater degree in creative and gifted individuals, overexcitabilities are expressed in increased sensitivity, awareness, and intensity, and represent a real difference in the fabric of life and quality of experience. (p. 345)

This phenomenon of overexcitabilities in gifted adolescents can intensify reactions in the affective realm, making situations more challenging for gifted adolescents to handle. Dabrowski's work is integral to understanding why gifted adolescents need specific affective learning opportunities. The intensities they often

exhibit associated with affective content makes their need for support imperative. As noted by Daniels and Piechowski (2009):

Gifted children take in information from the world around them: they react and respond more quickly and intensely than other children. They are stimulated both by what's going on around them and by what moves them from within. Because they can be so greatly stimulated, and because they perceive and process things differently, gifted children are often misunderstood. (p. 4)

Dabrowski was “struck by [the gifted children’s] intensity, sensitivity, and tendency toward emotional extremes” (Daniels & Piechowski, 2009, p.6). With guidance around affective content, gifted adolescents can work through affective situations in a healthy manner. For Dabrowski, the drama of inner seeking, figuring out the world, feeling anguish, questioning the meaning of human existence, testing one’s values and ideals, growing in empathy and understanding others – these are the elements that encompass the striving for optimal human development” (Daniels & Piechowski, 2009, p. 7). The following table describes manifestations of overexcitabilities in gifted learners.

Table 1

Overexcitabilities in Gifted Learners

MANIFESTATIONS OF OVEREXCITABILITIES IN GIFTED LEARNERS

Psychomotor
<i>Surplus of energy</i>
<i>Psychomotor expression of emotional tension</i>
“Psychomotor OE does not directly relate to advanced physical ability, but rather to intensified physical activity and sensitivity” (Daniels, S. & Piechowski, M., 2009, p. 37).
Sensual
<i>Heightened sensory awareness</i>
Intellectual
<i>Insatiable curiosity</i>
“Voracious appetite and capacity for intellectual effort and stimulation” (Daniels, S. & Piechowski, M., 2009, p. 43).
Imaginational
<i>Rich imagination</i>
<i>Creative</i>
Emotional
<i>Intense feelings</i>

Strong affective memory

Children with emotional OE may be “bearing enormous loads of feelings that accumulate from various fears and anxieties” (Daniels, S. & Piechowski, M., 2009, p. 51).

Adapted from “Counseling the Gifted & Talented”, by L.K. Silverman, 2000 and “Living with Intensity”, S. Daniels & M. Piechowski, 2009

Two additional emotional issues that gifted adolescents are subject to are perfectionism and anxiety. Perfectionism and anxiety are often associated with gifted learners (Fonseca, 2011; Galbraith & Delisle, 2011; Galbraith & Delisle, 2015; Silverman, 2013). The predisposition of many gifted learners to have intense emotional responses heightens the effects of anxiety. When a person becomes anxious, the amygdala fires in a fight or flight response and the pre-frontal cortex is not able to function in a capacity that allows the adolescent to make appropriate decisions (Arnsten, Raskind, Taylor, & Connor, 2015). This is germane to the current study because teachers and administrators may not understand that many of their gifted students are perfectionists. What may be a crowning achievement for a “normal” student, such as getting a high score on a test, may be a source of intense anxiety for a gifted student (Arnsten et al., 2015).

Perfectionism is usually viewed as a negative. However, perfectionism can be associated with positive outcomes when the adolescent is supported. In a study by Stoeber and Rambow (2007), 121 gifted adolescent students participated in a study to examine perfectionism, motivation, and well-being. The authors found that “adolescent

students who strive for perfection at school tend to react negatively when they do not achieve perfect results” (Stoeber & Rambow, 2007, p. 138). Stoeber and Rambow’s (2007) findings also show that:

Adolescent students, who strive for perfection at school, but do not get stressed, angry, or frustrated when results are not perfect, show higher well-being than students, who do not strive for perfection, thus providing further support for the view that perfectionistic strivings—with proper control of perfectionistic concerns—are positive (p.138).

Perfectionism is an issue that gifted adolescents deal with throughout their lives. David Sousa (2009) found that “some gender and age differences have been noted. For example, gifted high school girls had significantly less self-confidence, more perfectionism, and more discouragement than younger gifted girls” (p. 32). Therefore, for the purpose of the current study, it appears that school-level affective learning and development initiatives for gifted students should take into account their tendency to be perfectionists. Moreover, the above research suggests that teachers should not try to squelch perfectionism, as it can be beneficial.

Many issues of affective learning overlap in the lives of gifted adolescents. The abovementioned problem of perfectionism is linked to the asynchrony and overexcitabilities that affect how gifted adolescents see the world. Webb (2013), founder of SENG (Social and Emotional Needs of Gifted), writes:

When intensity and sensitivity are combined with idealism, as so often happens with bright children and adults, good things can happen because they can keenly see how things might be. But this can also lead to frustration, disillusionment, and unhappiness. Sometimes this prompts perfectionism; other times it results in existential depression. Through our relationships, we must provide understanding and nurturance so that they do not feel alone and helpless in a world that seems so paradoxical, arbitrary, and even absurd. We can help nurture their idealism, and indeed we must if the world is to become a better place. (p. 1)

Another necessity for gifted adolescents is emotional awareness. In my experience, gifted adolescents struggle to understand their own needs, let alone the needs and motivation of their peers. “Without emotional awareness, we won’t be able to understand our own needs and motivation. Also, we won’t be able to communicate with other effectively. Worst of all, we are at higher risk of becoming beleaguered in threatening situations” (Cambridge, J., 2014, p. 15). A position paper published by the Colorado Association for Gifted and Talented found that:

Social-emotional programming and support that is specific to individual sub-populations and unique needs must be provided for gifted students. By identifying and addressing the needs for such support, teachers, administrators, counselors, and the students themselves can proactively develop and nurture those skills.

(CAGT-Social & Emotional Needs, 2015)

Dr. James Webb, founder of SENG (Social and Emotional Needs of the Gifted), agreed that without proactive affective support, gifted individuals may be at greater risk for negative consequences. He stated that:

It has been my experience that gifted and talented persons are more likely to experience a type of depression referred to as existential depression. Although an episode of existential depression may be precipitated in anyone by a major loss or the threat of a loss, which highlights the transient nature of life, persons of higher intellectual ability are more prone to experience existential depression spontaneously. Sometimes this existential depression is tied into the positive disintegration experience referred to by Dabrowski. (Webb, 2011)

History of Affective Learning

Awareness and understanding regarding the importance of affective learning is not a new phenomenon. Clinical Psychologist Dr. Leta Stetter Hollingworth was the first to discuss the unique needs of gifted learners in the 1930s. She created the first college course devoted to the study of issues pertaining to gifted learners and designed a program for gifted students (Neville, Piechowski, & Tolan, 2013). Hollingworth's work became the foundation and model for the provision of gifted education. Her philosophy strongly hinged on the idea of "individual personal development" (Neville, Piechowski, & Tolan, 2013, p.1). Hollingworth understood the unique affective situations that arise in gifted learners, which she found correlates to their intelligence levels, Hollingworth also noted

the need for those who work with gifted children to be experienced with the unique aspects of those children:

The psychologist who is professionally acquainted with children who test above 130 IQ will be able to formulate clearly certain special problems of adjustment, observed in the case study of these children, which arise primarily from the very fact that they are gifted...The more intelligent the child, the more likely he is to become involved in these puzzling situations. (Hollingworth, as cited in Silverman, L., 2000, p. 23)

The above concept expressed by Hollingworth was the basis behind the Columbus Group definition stated in Chapter 1. In the book *Off the Chart-Asynchrony and the Gifted Child* (2013), Tolan and Piechowski explain that:

The Columbus Group definition of giftedness as asynchronous development grew directly out of the friction within the field of gifted education between the internal view of giftedness as an inborn aspect of an individual – the *who* – and the external view of giftedness as behavior, achievement, and product creation – essentially the *what*. (p.2)

Another important concept regarding affective learning for gifted learners is that educators need to understand that gifted learners require support in all areas of their lives. “Talent development and personal growth are contrasting educational ideologies” (Neville, Piechowski, & Tolan, 2013, p. 2). Talent development focuses on strengthening a specific talent the student possesses. This is often what the general public and many

educators feel is best for gifted learners. Unfortunately, focusing solely on talent development can be detrimental to the gifted child, because it only takes one aspect of the whole child into consideration. Personal growth is equally important. Jean Peterson, as cited in *Off the Charts – Asynchrony and the Gifted Child*, shares one student's frustration. "I have done everything my parents and coaches have asked me to do – expected me to do. Straight A's, success in extracurriculars, well-behaved. But I don't know who I am" (Neville, Piechowski, & Tolan, 2013, p. 3).

The view that gifted adolescents struggles with personal growth issues is further supported by Peterson (2008), who notes that, "Because [gifted children and teens] are perceived as highly capable and may appear to be doing well, many adults assume that gifted children and teens are handling social and emotional concerns adequately" (p. 1). Peterson (2008) also explains, "Gifted teens are often reluctant to ask for help, believing, like the adults, that they should be able to deal effectively with personal problems, difficult circumstances, low morale, or low motivation by themselves" (p. 1). All adolescents face emotional issues, but gifted adolescents "may have a heightened self-awareness. In addition, gifted students may be perfectionistic or excessively critical of what they can do and achieve" (Johnson, 2001, p. 15).

Within the area of affective content related to gifted adolescents, there are many topics to consider. The Colorado Department of Education Office of Gifted Education states that affective programming to address social and emotional skills of gifted students

and support the attainment of affective goal completion should include, but not limited to the following areas:

- Understanding of individual giftedness (self-perception)
- Perfectionism
- Stress
- Mood swings and sadness
- Friendship and relationships
- Resiliency
- Risk taking
- Organizational and study skills
- Underachievement
- Transitioning (Colorado Department of Education, Office of Gifted Education, n.d.)

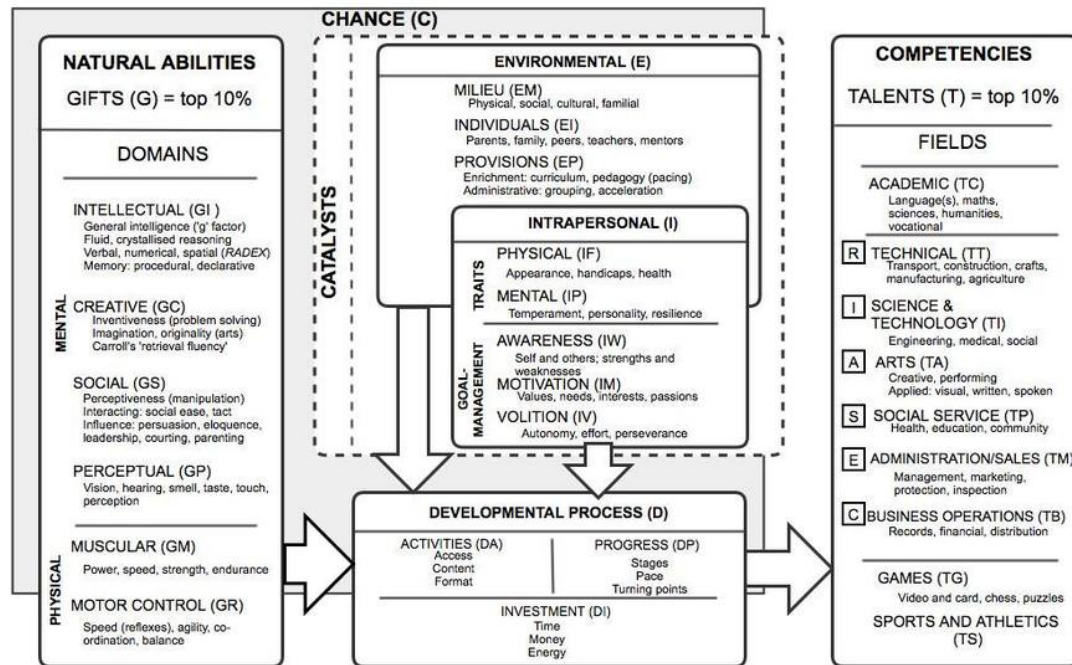
Models of Giftedness

As part of the larger picture of talent development, many researchers include a component of affective development in their models of giftedness (Sousa, 2009).

Research has found that for gifted children and adolescents to develop their talent competencies, they need to have a strong foundation in affective areas. Figure 1 shows that Gagne's Talent Development Model includes a full section dealing with intrapersonal aspects of the child, such as motivation, volition, and awareness.

Figure 1

Gagne's Talent Development Model (Sousa, 2009)



Joseph Renzulli developed the Three-Ring Conception of Giftedness. Two of the rings have components linked to affective content. Task commitment includes such areas as perseverance, hard work, endurance, perceptiveness, self-confidence, and a special fascination with a specific subject. These areas all relate to affective learning and gifted adolescents should be exposed to opportunities to learn about them. Creativity includes flexibility, fluency, originality of thought, sensitivity to stimulations, openness to experiences, and a willingness to take risks (Sousa, 2009). The idea of sensitivity to stimulation also relates to Dabrowski's work regarding intensity in gifted learners.

The above model suggests that giftedness does not only relate to academic ability. A given gifted adolescent may have strong affective development as well as academic ability. In fact, the model suggests that an adolescent could be considered gifted if he/she had strong affective development and skills regardless of his/her academic ability, as both are needed for personal growth and success. In the current study, the concept of non-intellectual giftedness (social aptitude, for example) will not be directly explored, but I will keep in mind that some gifted students require more affective development than others.

Building on the concept that affective and cognitive development are intertwined, Sousa (2009) found that from a neuroscience perspective, emotions are related to cognitive brain function. Sousa (2009) stated that:

The complex qualities included in general abilities, such as processing information, integrating experiences, and abstract thinking, all require input from the frontal lobe, parts of the emotional system (limbic area), and other regions as well. Commitment to task is often rooted in intrinsic motivation (p.14).

The following figure illustrates Renzulli's model, as articulated by Sousa (2009), of the intersecting aspects of gifted behavior. This illustration shows that cognitive and emotional development do not occur separately and in fact, influence each other:

Figure 2

Renzulli's Three-Ring of Giftedness (Sousa, 2009)



Aspects of Neuroscience and Technology Related to Gifted Adolescents

Neuroscience Findings

Advancement in neuroscience has led to an increased understanding of how the gifted brain functions. Neuroscience has found that the gifted brain is physiologically

different and that fact should be taken into consideration when planning learning opportunities for gifted individuals. Tetreault, Haase and Duncan (2016) found that “neuroscience research supports the belief that gifted individuals have increased intellectual, emotional, sensory and motor processing capacity” (p. 7). Neuroscience research has also found that the brains of gifted individuals differ in six ways, including; increased regional brain volumes, greater connectivity across brain regions, brains that operate more efficiently, greater sensory sensitivity, expanded brain areas dedicated to emotional intelligence, and expanded brain areas that respond more actively to challenges (Tetreault et al., 2016). “Individuals with higher IQ have increased grey matter volume in various regions of the brain” (Tetreault et al., 2016, p. 8). This increased volume is found in multiple areas of the brain, including frontal lobes, temporal lobes, parietal lobes and occipital lobes. The increase in grey matter may explain the greater sensitivity to sensory stimuli found in many gifted individuals:

The expansion and greater connectivity may also explain why gifted individuals seem to use emotional information differently, in that emotional information permeates all areas of intellectual functions” and could explain heightened emotional responses with regards to depression and anxiety. (Tetreault et al., 2016, p. 11)

Supporting the view that gifted persons’ brains may be wired differently, Tetreault et al. (2016) contested that “Gifted individuals experience, process and respond to the world in ways that are qualitatively different ” than their age peers and

neuroscience research shows that the gifted brain has notable functional differences compared to the average brain. This is not to say that the expression of giftedness should be considered elitist. The authors go on to state that, “One does not have to be gifted to be high achieving, eminent or successful. Conversely, just because one is gifted does not mean that they will become high achieving, eminent or successful” (Tetreault et al., 2016, p. 4).

Teaching Digital Natives

A digital native is a person who considers computer/digital technology to be routine and normal; this is the case for most adolescents, who have interacted with technology for all their lives. As technology becomes an integral part of delivering curricula, educators must provide curricula that can be delivered in an effective manner to digital natives while providing comprehensive learning opportunities. As noted above, gifted adolescents’ brains process information differently. Since technology plays a vital role in adolescent learning experiences, understanding the nuances of the gifted brain as it processes information through technology is important.

That understanding was noted by Prensky (2010), as he described digital native students as assuming many functions in their education, including researcher, technology user, thinker/sense maker, world changer and self-teacher. The first role, that of a researcher, enables them to find out information for themselves and “provides a level of respect that they may not receive when thought of as mere students...the atmosphere would be much more equal and collegial, which is exactly the goal in the partnering

pedagogy” (Prensky, 2010, p. 18). The role of technology user emphasizes that the teacher should facilitate the student’s use of technology. This allows the student to construct his/her own learning. The third role is the student as a thinker and sense maker, where metacognition comes into play. Prensky (2010) opined that regarding this role, the teacher’s primary role is to help “students know frequently that thinking more logically and more critically is one of their roles. This is one reason peer-to-peer communication, both orally and in writing, is so important to the partnering pedagogy; it lets students see and evaluate just how logically and critically they and their peers think” (p.19).

The next role of the student involves being a world changer. The learning should be from real-life context in which it “involves the students immediately using what they learn to do something and/or change something in the world. It is crucial that students be made aware that using what they learn to effect positive change in the world, large or small, is one of their important roles in school” (p. 20). This role also requires the student to be metacognitive.

Prensky (2010) noted that the final role as a self-teacher is possibly the most difficult. In this role, the student constructs his/her own knowledge using research from multiple sources. This role lends itself well to Lev Vygotsky’s Constructivist Learning Theory. Utilizing Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development, teachers can scaffold the students’ learning by giving feedback throughout the process of research and exploration.

“Being a digital native suggests that one has grown up immersed in a culture so that its nuances are accessible to the person, not foreign or unintelligible, make sense, and

can be inferred” (Cross, 2011, p. 148). In his research, Giedd (2012) concluded, “the digital revolution is altering the arena in which teens pursue the perpetual tasks of adolescent development – to learn about the world, to establish their independence and identities, and to socialize with their peers” (p. 104). Social media and technology in general has changed the way adolescents interact and communicate. This must be taken into account when planning affective learning opportunities.

The relevance of the above discussion to the present study is that most if not all of the students at the study location, gifted and otherwise, are digital natives. Therefore, educators and administrators need to present affective development materials in a way that these digital natives are most likely to understand and respond to, i.e., digitally, via audiovisual presentations, social media, and school website content. As Giedd (2012) noted, social media and Internet content are now the primary means by which most adolescents assimilate information.

Metacognition and the Gifted Adolescent

In order for a student to be metacognitive regarding their affective needs, they must first be exposed and engaged in the process of learning about the social and emotional issues affecting their lives. Only then will they be able to create a meaningful goal in an area of need. Margaret Wheatley (1998) wrote:.

To be responsible inventors and discoverers, we need the courage to let go of the old world, to relinquish most of what we have cherished, to abandon our interpretations about what does and does not work. We must learn to see the

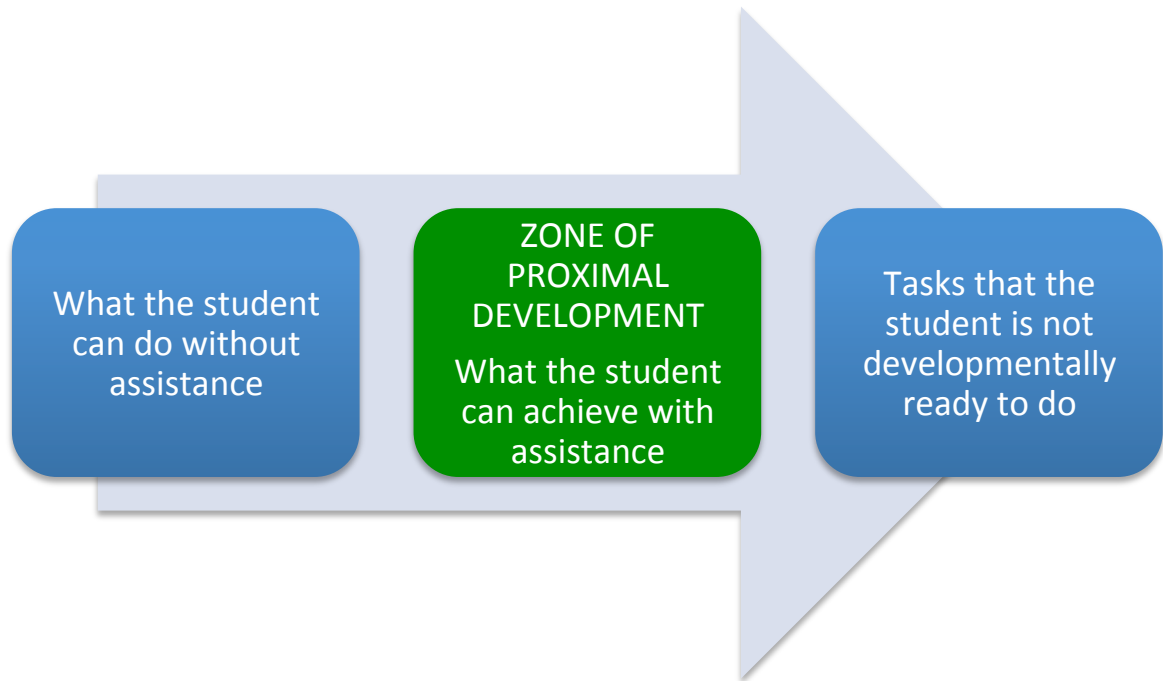
world anew. As Einstein is often quoted as saying: 'No problem can be solved from the same consciousness that created it.' (p. 13)

Students will need guidance in their learning to maximize the level of success they can achieve. Teachers can support this learning by utilizing Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (ZPD). The zone of proximal development is defined by Vygotsky as the distance between a child's 'actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving' and the higher level of 'potential development as determined through problem solving' under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Daniels, 1996, p. 4). Teachers scaffold learning experiences to allow students the opportunity to achieve a greater understanding of the material than they would without such guidance. An example of this was noted earlier in the chapter when Prensky's role of the student as a self-teacher was discussed. Although the student is in charge of their learning, it is imperative for the teacher to guide the student and scaffold learning to allow the student to work in their zone of proximal development. Similar to building a structure, scaffolding is used as support during the learning and taken away when no longer needed.

Figure 3 illustrates the continuum of what the student can and cannot achieve without outside assistance.

Figure 3

Student Learning Continuum



As cited in Daniels (1996), Vygotsky stated that:

The growth of a normal child into civilization usually involves a fusion with the processes of organic maturation. Both planes of development – the natural and the cultural – coincide and mingle with one another. The two lines interpenetrate one another and essentially form a single line of sociobiological formation of the child's personality (p. 67).

Affective Curriculum

Affective curriculum commonly requires delivery of content in a group setting (Mofield & Chakraborti-Ghosh, 2010; VanTassel-Baska, Cross, & Olenchak, 2009).

VanTassel-Baska (2009) described multiple social and emotional curriculum options for

gifted learners, but they all require time commitments from educators trained in the needs of gifted learners and are more compatible with an elementary setting. The lack of time and resources to deliver such content is an aspect of the current study problem.

VanTassel-Baska (2009) noted, “Affective curriculum is a topic more honored in the breach than in the observance” (p.113). She explains that there may be several reasons for this neglect, including the idea that affective programs are viewed as being “soft” and difficult to assess or resources may be limited (VanTassel-Baska, 2009).

VanTassel-Baska refutes that idea, however, by giving several reasons why affective curricula should be utilized with gifted learners.

1. Feelings drive thinking - The work of Damasio (1994, 1999) and other neurological researchers suggest that thought is triggered by stimulus of emotion. We feel, which in turn, encourages cognitive brain activity.
 2. Research in gifted education past and present suggests that attention needs to be paid to the social and emotional side of gifted learners because they are vulnerable in many aspects on this dimension of development.
 3. Research on motivation will also suggest that conative characteristics appear to be underlying supports to the talent development process
- (VanTassel-Baska, 2009, p.113-14)

When gifted adolescents are engaged in affective learning opportunities, such as discussion groups or activities, the students have the opportunity to be metacognitive. Reflective questions are posed to the adolescent and they engage in reflective practices to

answer the questions. These learning opportunities are useful for all gifted adolescents, but current research has suggested that gifted female adolescents struggle with content specific to their gender. In their study of changes in emotional resiliency in gifted adolescent females, Kline and Short (1991) discovered that:

Self-perceived abilities and confidence for girls clearly declined progressively from elementary and primary grades through junior high school, and further declined through senior high school. By high school, the females feel significantly less willing to reveal themselves to those around them, hiding their intelligence, sensitivity and feelings, and trying to act tougher than they are. They do not value or believe others value their abilities and feelings as much as they did when they were younger. (p. 120)

Peterson discussed the need for proactive interventions that can address affective concerns of gifted adolescents. She noted that “Reactive attention to social and emotional concerns of gifted adolescents is often the only attention those concerns receive in school” (Peterson, 2003, p. 62). Peterson contested that there has been little scholarly attention to preventing social and emotional distress or developing strategies that help gifted individuals deal with these issues. She felt that programs focusing on proactive attention to social and emotional concerns would help prevent difficulties and promote healthy development of high-ability students (Peterson, 2003).

This view was supported by a recent study in Australia that found that gifted adolescents need different educational responses to their social and emotional needs

depending on the relationship between educational setting, type and degree of giftedness, and personality (Vialle, Heaven, & Ciarrochi, 2007). Each student has unique social and emotional needs and requires individualized learning experiences to understand their own personal growth. Also, Peterson (2015) warned that “School counselors should not assume that gifted children and teens will find their own way or that parents can provide adequate guidance, regardless of socioeconomic status” (p. 160). Swiatek (1998) agreed and shared possible solutions for supporting gifted adolescents within the time constraints of rigorous schedules:

1. Schools should allow ability grouping (full or part-time) to encourage formation of support groups with ability peers.
 2. Enrichment programs
 3. Counselor facilitated discussion groups (both mixed gender and separate session for each gender to discuss gender specific issues)
 4. Encouragement of activities with all students having similar interests
- (Swiatek, 1998, p. 44-45).

Cultivating Affective Goal Setting

The Colorado Department of Education requires that students on an Advanced Learning Plan (ALP) create an annual academic and affective goal (Colorado Department of Education, Office of Gifted Education, n.d.). The affective goal can reflect one of five competencies: personal, social, communication, leadership, and/or cultural. This process

allows students to be metacognitive regarding how their giftedness affects their overall life experiences.

In support of this view, Morisano and Shore (2010) recommended that parents and educators place greater emphasis on the process of personal goal setting and less on the importance of grades and test scores. They state that “when children are able to clearly specify intrinsically appealing short-term and long-term life goals, their levels of motivation, self-concept, self-efficacy, and subjective well-being should be enhanced” (p. 256). A benefit to having gifted adolescents set goals is that the “self-regulatory processes involved in establishing, planning, striving, and deciding on goals should help to monitor emotions and internal conflict” (Morisano & Shore, 2010, p. 252).

Furthermore, prior to students writing an affective goal, they must have a foundational understanding of the chosen topic. Engagement and motivation are key components to accomplishing a personal goal. Morisano and Shore (2010) also found that “the mere *presence* of self-rated ‘important’ goals was as strongly correlated with positive affect as actually attaining those goals” (p. 252). To engage metacognition in the process, students need to have an understanding of the goal topic. “Goal setting can be very useful in helping gifted children decide which of their possibly multiple talents or interests they should nurture and which they should set aside” (Morisano & Shore, 2010, p. 255). The current study has as one of its concerns the need for gifted adolescents to develop the life skill of affective goal-setting.

State of Colorado Requirements

The Office of Gifted Education at the Colorado Department of Education released guidelines in 2016 explaining the process of creating standards-aligned advanced learning plans (ALP) for students. It requires that students create annual academic and affective goals. The guidelines state that “Affective goals reflect development of personal, social, communication, leadership, and/or cultural competency” (Colorado Department of Education, Office of Gifted Education, n.d., p. 3). A comprehensive model for goal setting is the use of a SMART goal (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and timely). A student with an ALP will create a SMART goal for achievement and a SMART goal for affective development on an annual basis (Colorado Department of Education, Office of Gifted Education, n.d.).

A document offering teachers guidance on the ALP process was created by the Office of Gifted Education. The main sections of the document provide guidance on ALP creation for gifted students:

The Exceptional Children’s Educational Act (ECEA) is Colorado’s primary law with requirements for the implementation of specific elements and procedures for gifted education programs. These requirements include Administrative Unit (AU) provisions for the Advanced Learning Plan, the main topic for this guidebook.

The Advanced Learning Plan (ALP) is a legal document [22-20-R-12.00, C.R.S.] outlining programming for identified gifted students and is used as a guide for educational planning and decision-making. The Exceptional Children’s

Educational Act states that there will be ALP content and procedures set in Rule for statewide implementation; and that goals in the ALP are standards-based. Sections 12.02(2)(f) – 12.02(2)(g)(vi) of the Rules clarify ALP content, procedures and responsibilities. For high school students the ALP may be blended with an Individual Career and Academic Plan (ICAP) if all contents of the ALP are inclusive in the ICAP, including achievement and affective goals. An ALP shall be developed for every gifted student according to the student’s determined area(s) of giftedness, interests, and instructional and affective needs. (CDE, 2016, p.3)

This aspect of affective goal setting is described as “reflecting development of personal, social, communication, leadership, and/or cultural competency [12.02(2)(f)(ii)]” (Colorado Department of Education, 2016, p. 3). Gifted students should understand the five competencies prior to creating an affective goal.

The primary research question guiding this study was how secondary schools incorporate affective learning opportunities for gifted adolescents into the school curriculum. The National Association of Gifted Children (NAGC) and Colorado Department of Education (CDE) have created standards that influence much of the affective ALP goal work. These standards are the attributes that students need to attain to achieve affective development. The State of Colorado requires that ALP goals be written to align with standards discussed below. Teacher and counselors can access these

standards to assist in the creation of academic as well as affective goals. Standards for affective goal development in Colorado come from three specific mandates:

1. National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) Pre-K to Grade 12

Programming Standards support affective goal development. More information on these standards may be found at:

<http://www.nagc.org/resources-publications/resources/national-standards-gifted-and-talented-education/pre-k-grade-12> (Appendix A)

2. Colorado Academic Standards:

Comprehensive Health: Emotional and Social Wellness

<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cohealth>

Utilize knowledge and skills to enhance mental, emotional, and social well being.

Exhibit responsible personal and social behavior that respects self and others in physical activity settings.

Social Studies: Civics Rights, roles and responsibilities of citizens

<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cosocialstudies/statestandards>

3. Colorado Career and Technical Education (CTE) Standards, Essential Skills for Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness (PWR)

http://www.coloradostateplan.com/content_standards.htm (Colorado Department of Education, 2016)

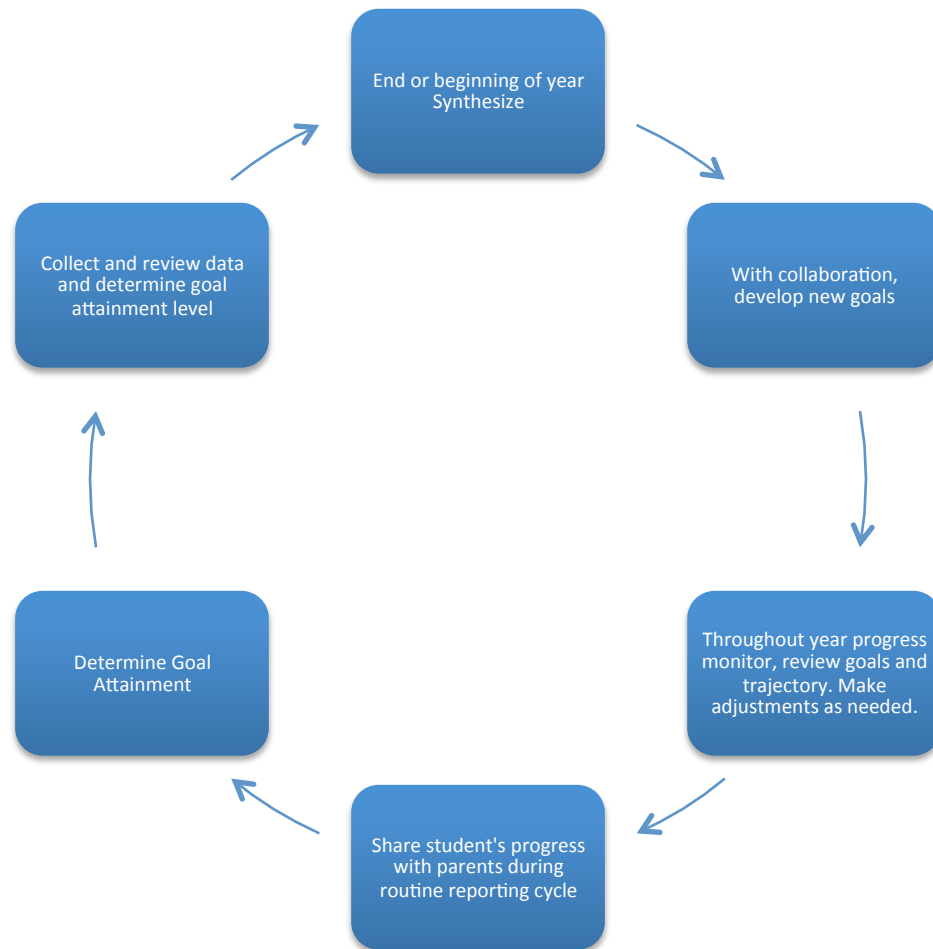
There are several types of affective goals written around these standards. It is important to understand if the affective learning that gifted adolescents receive is aligned with the following affective content. The content includes:

- Goals that further develop personal or social skills
- Goals that develop leadership and communication
- Goals that increase cultural awareness and understanding
- Goals that modify or eliminate personal or social behaviors that interfere with a student reaching his or her potential
- Goals that prepare students for college and/or a career (Colorado Department of Education, 2016)

The Gifted Education Office of the Colorado Department of Education describes the ALP development process as follows. The development of an ALP and the ALP goals should be a collaborative process with the student, teacher and parents. All stakeholders must understand the cycle of goal setting to allow it to be a viable and worthwhile process. Figure 4 illustrates this process.

Figure 4

ALP Development Cycle



This figure illustrates the cyclic nature of ALP development, as the student's progress is continually reevaluated and changes are made accordingly. The relevance of this model to the current study is that the ALP development process is dynamic and requires constant attention. This attention may be lacking when schools lack sufficient resources to provide it.

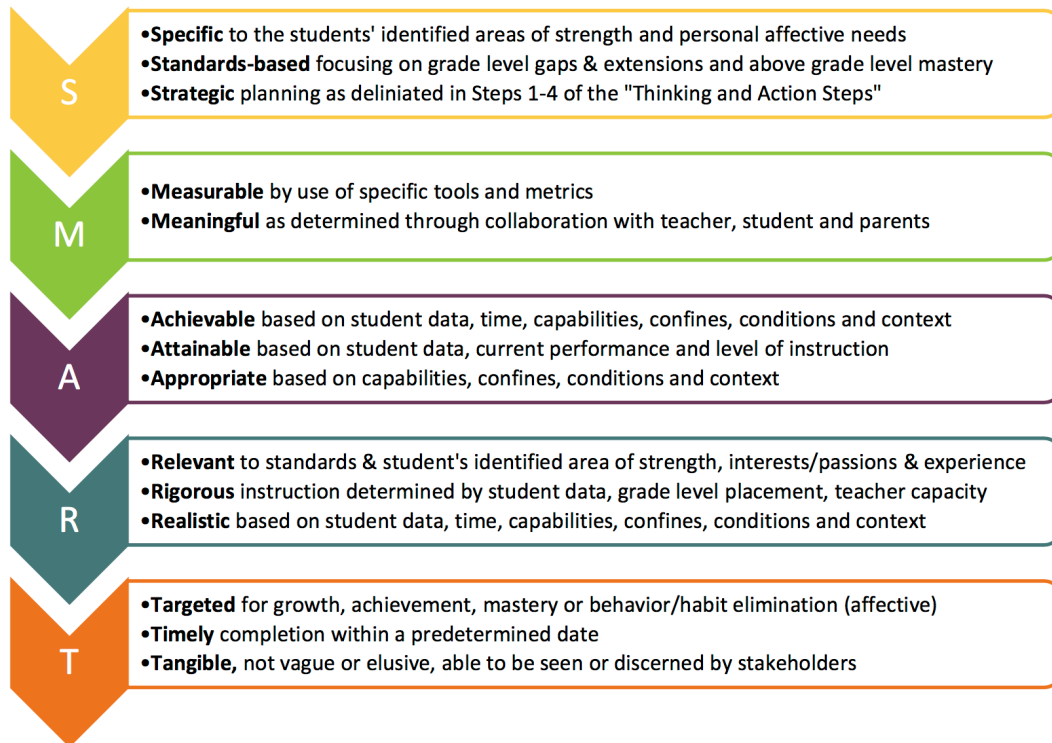
An essential part of the ALP process is developing strong goals. According to the Office of Gifted Education, Exceptional Children's Educational Act (ECEA) regulations require gifted students have at least two SMART learning goals within their ALPs: one achievement goal, academic and/or talent, for their identified area(s) of strength, and one affective goal for social-emotional development or college and career planning. Figure 5, below, shows the attributes of SMART Learning Goals and the aspects that should be included in the creation of ALP goals. The use of SMART Goals is recommended by the Colorado Department of Education as the platform to create ALP goals. This format can be used in the creation of academic and affective goals and relates to the study problem in terms of necessary teaching strategies.

Figure 5

SMART Learning Goal Attributes

SMART Learning Goals

ALP goals should contain each of the following attributes:



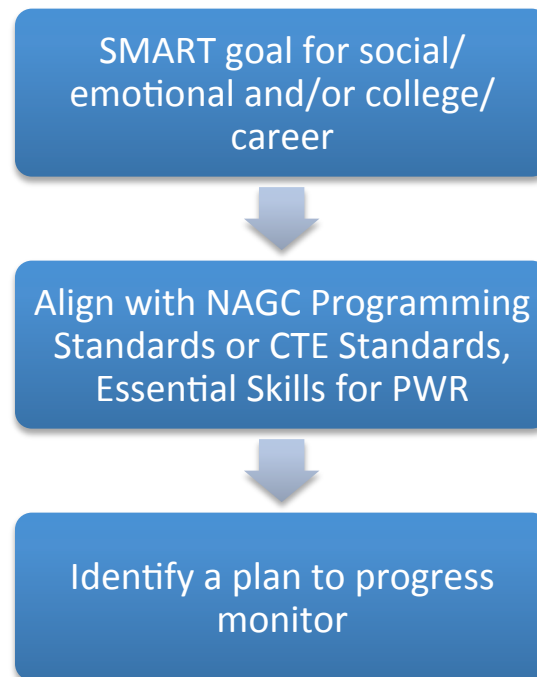
(Colorado Department of Education, Office of Gifted Education, n.d.).

Figure 6, below, shows the process used by gifted students on Advanced Learning Plans to create and monitor affective goals. It is imperative that the students understand what affective content is prior to creating a affective goal. This relates to the aforementioned necessity for gifted students to understand the various elements of affective learning.

Figure 6

Colorado Department of Education Affective Goal Writing Process

Affective Goal(s)



Conclusion

The literature review examined (1) understanding the unique affective needs of gifted adolescents, (2) history of affective learning, (3) aspects of neuroscience and technology related to gifted adolescents, (4) affective curriculum, and (5) goal setting and affective learning opportunities within the secondary school settings. As adolescents graduate and move into the workforce, it is imperative that they develop a foundational

understanding of affective content, as workplace and career success depend at least as much on affective development as they do on intellectual development and competence. The Center for Creative Leadership reports that “75 percent of careers are derailed for reasons related to emotional competencies, including inability to handle interpersonal problems; unsatisfactory team leadership during times of difficulty or conflict; or inability to adapt to change or elicit trust.” Current research shows limited opportunities for gifted adolescents to learn about affective content in the school curriculum. This case study examined how educators in a rural Colorado school district access and use affective materials with gifted adolescents to build knowledge around affective content and assist in goal development. The next chapter will present the methodology used to collect and analyze the data for this case study.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Introduction

This study was a multiple case study that focused on a persistent problem of practice. The case study was particularistic in nature. Merriam defines particularistic as focusing

...on a particular situation, event, program, or phenomenon. The case itself is important for what it reveals about the phenomenon and for what it might represent. This specificity of focus makes it an especially good design for practical problems – for questions, situations, or puzzling occurrences arising from everyday practice. (Merriam, 1998, p. 425)

Utilizing a case study allowed me to explore the opportunities currently available to gifted adolescents in secondary schools to develop affectively. In doing so, I attempted to focus on the entirety of their school environments. Qualitative case studies are beneficial for the researcher “interested in insight, discovery, and interpretation rather than hypothesis testing” (Merriam, 1998, p. 415). This study, accordingly, was not about forming or testing hypotheses, but to gather information and learn what is happening in the schools.

Yin (2003) noted six possible sources of evidence for case studies: documents, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant-observation, and physical artifacts (p. 85-96). This study utilized three sources of evidence to examine the research questions: documents (curricular resources), interviews (conducted and transcribed by the

researcher), and physical artifacts (posters and announcements made visible to students). Yin (2003) writes that the case study's strength is "its ability to deal with a full variety of evidence – documents, artifacts, interviews, and observations" (2003, p. 8).

This qualitative approach "explores real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information and reports a case description and case themes" (Creswell, 2013, p. 97). The data from this study provide an understanding of how secondary schools offer affective learning opportunities to gifted adolescents. Case study was chosen for this research because it allows the researcher to "understand a real world case and assume that such an understanding is likely to involve important contextual conditions pertinent to the case" (Yin, 2013, p. 16). There are four aspects of case study that made it the best option for this research:

1. Explain the presumed causal links in real-world interventions that are too complex for survey or experimental methods
2. To describe an intervention and the real-world context in which it occurred
3. Illustrate certain topics within an evaluation, again in a descriptive mode
4. Enlightens those situations in which the intervention being evaluated has no clear, single set of outcomes (Yin, 2013, p.19).

Background

The idea for this research study emerged from conversations with educators working with gifted adolescents and the challenges they face helping students develop

affective goals for their ALPs. Gifted education directors and teachers frequently complain about the difficulty they face supporting gifted adolescents with affective development and affective goal writing for their Advanced Learning Plans (ALPs). The Colorado Department of Education (2016) states that “Affective goal setting should reflect development of personal, social, communication, leadership, and/or cultural competency” (p. 3). The findings from this study can help gifted educators and counselors as they help students create meaningful affective goals. Additionally, the development of high-quality affective goals by students should increase their metacognition regarding affective skills that are essential to the achievement in the work force.

Persistent Problem in Practice

There is a lack of services and support for gifted adolescents to foster healthy affective development. The Colorado Department of Education requires that every student on an Advanced Learning Plan (ALP) create annually an academic and affective goal (Colorado Department of Education, Office of Gifted Education, n.d.). If gifted adolescents do not have a foundational understanding of affective development, they will be unable to create meaningful affective goals, let alone work to accomplish those goals.

Research Question

The immediate purpose of this study was to examine factors contributing to gifted adolescents’ understanding of affective development. What physical artifacts contribute to the affective learning of students? What curriculum are teachers providing to support

affective development as it relates to gifted adolescents needs? This study focused on one main research question and three sub-questions.

RQ1. How do secondary schools incorporate affective learning opportunities for gifted adolescents?

RQ1_a. What environmental factors are present to support/deter gifted adolescents' healthy affective development?

RQ1_b. What curricular factors are present to support gifted adolescents' healthy affective development?

RQ1_c. How do educators support/dissuade health affective development of gifted adolescents?

Population and Sampling

The Gifted Education Director for a rural Colorado school district worked with the researcher to explore if there is a need for affective learning for gifted adolescents prior to the students creating affective ALP goals. The research examined the factors that contribute to affective learning opportunities and affective goal writing.

Three middle schools and one high school were chosen for the study. The district has 1,296 students in middle school and 2,070 students in high school. A chart with the student demographics for each school in the study is presented below and will be discussed in chapter 4. To adhere to anonymity, the schools are not named and the teachers are given pseudonyms.

The table below describes the demographics and state assessment data results for the participating schools. Three of the schools were middle schools and one was a high school. Schools Two and Four share a campus and are located in a different town than Schools One and Three.

Table 2

Participating School Demographics

School Name	School One	School Two	School Three	School Four
School Level	Middle School	Middle School	Middle School	High School
Student Enrollment	501 Students	210 Students	585 Students	321 Students
Reading - Proficient or Advanced on State Assessment	69.59%	49.21%	66.90%	49.71%
Writing - Proficient or Advanced on State Assessment	52.83%	37.40%	51.57%	36.26%
Math - Proficient or Advanced on State Assessment	56.84%	30.71%	58.36%	22.81%

Source: Colorado Department of Education

(<https://edx.cde.state.co.us/SchoolView/DataCenter/reports>)

The secondary schools were physically examined to assess what opportunities are available that contribute to gifted adolescents' understanding of affective development. The schools were chosen by my subjective assessments of their websites and mission statement; those assessments were based on my knowledge of affective and educational issues, based on my background research. Two schools that express strong academic objectives on their website and mission statement were selected and two schools that express strong affective objectives on their website and mission statement were selected. An assumption was made that schools emphasizing affective topics in their mission statements would be found to have more artifacts and curricular resources relating to affective development available within the school. The study was divided into three components. Interviews, artifacts, and curricular materials were parts of the case study. The components of the study are shown in the table below.

Table 3

Components of Study

<i>Source</i>	<i>Description</i>
<i>Interviews</i>	<i>Interviews with the gifted coordinators/teachers/director that work in the four secondary schools examined in the study.</i>
<i>Artifact Analysis</i>	<i>Posters, art work, and exhibits relating to affective learning that were displayed in the hallways and classrooms in each school.</i>
<i>Curriculum Analysis</i>	<i>Curriculum or resources used to teach students about affective content were analyzed.</i>

I observed school settings to ascertain how the environmental factors, such as posters and classroom setup, support or deter healthy affective development. These evaluations were subjective and depended on my understanding of the topic; also, key words and phrases related to affective development were observed. These observations occurred during the fall semester. Also, I analyzed affective curricula and/or learning opportunities that are offered at the four schools. This was done via informal questioning

of school officials and teachers, examination of school policy documents, and other observations.

Since the district is small, they only have three gifted teachers to support all of the secondary schools in the district. The three gifted education teachers working with the four schools were interviewed to ascertain how they offer affective learning opportunities specific to the needs of gifted adolescents. Two of the teachers are also gifted education coordinators and the third is the gifted education director for the district.

Data Collection

The case study methodology involved:

- 1 day visit to observe four schools' physical environments to identify artifacts,
- interviews with three gifted education teachers working in the four schools,
- analysis of affective curriculum and resources utilized within the four schools.

These components are fully described below.

Artifacts. The physical environment in four secondary schools was observed and analyzed. I toured the schools and looked for evidence of affective learning artifacts within the physical environment of the school. Such evidence was in the form of posters, school clubs, quotes, classroom setup, etc. Artifacts were examined and photographed in the entryway of the school, hallways, common areas, and gifted education classrooms.

These locations were where gifted students would be expected to spend the majority of their time. Pictures and notes of artifacts were collected and coded to find commonalities. The coding process was done in order to identify recurrent and dominant themes. The coding process used will be discussed later in this chapter.

Curricular resources. Affective curricula and activities to teach affective development were analyzed at each school. Curricula included any pedagogical programs used to assist in teaching affective development. The criteria used to evaluate such programs were how they were presented and described. If a given program related to personal/emotional/social development (rather than academic development), it was included in the analysis. Examples of curricula included school assemblies to discuss relationships and friendships, guest speakers, and discussion groups. The decision to use any specific curriculum was left up to the teacher.

Interviews. Three gifted education teachers that work in the four schools were interviewed to acquire understanding regarding affective learning opportunities for gifted adolescents. These teachers were identified through contact with school administrators and their participation in the study was solicited after permission was obtained to do so. One of the teachers was also the gifted education director and the other two teachers were gifted education coordinators for secondary education in the district, which allowed the collection of data that related to the study problem at the district level as perceived by those participants. The interviews gathered data on how each school shares information pertaining to affective development and how the school staff and/or district provide

learning opportunities to gifted adolescents. This semi-structured interview (Appendix C) allowed for a more in depth analysis of what is currently being done for gifted adolescents prior to creating affective ALP goals. The interviews were not open-ended because I wished to focus on the problem and topic as stated, rather than related issues. Likewise, the interviews were not completely structured because I wished to allow the participants some latitude in their responses, in order to provide rich and thick description.

Yin (2013) suggested that an important feature of a case study is that it “relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion” (p. 17). The multiple sources of evidence were a key component of this research design; as Bloomberg and Volpe (2013) pointed out, in case studies, triangulation is critical in attempting to obtain an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon and adds “rigor, breadth, and depth to the study and provides corroborative evidence of the data obtained” (p. 46). The data collected during the interviews and artifact collection were coded using matrices. I initially coded these matrices with categories that I expected to find and modified them in the course of my examination of the data. As the information was collected, it was coded for commonalities, such as words, phrases or topics. “Affective” and “affective learning opportunities” were categories that were set prior to the initial data collection. The coding of artifacts proved to be difficult, due to the varied nature of vocabulary and phrases used. It became apparent early on that the categories of affective and affective learning opportunities needed to be split into subcategories. General

affective topics needed to be delineated from affective topics specific to the needs and intensities of gifted learners. I also made the decision to classify phrases with similar meaning under the same heading, for example, positive communication and relationships.

Each school was coded separately for the data analysis. School-specific responses were added to that school's data, but many of the questions spanned the entire district since the three participants work at several schools in multiple capacities. The same was true of the curricular analysis. Occasionally, a resource would only be utilized in one school, but most of the time, the entire gifted education team works together to decide upon resources to utilize in the secondary schools. The opportunity to utilize these resources differed greatly depending on school. Since there were so few curricular resources, I organized the data as a whole and noted which resources were currently being used at particular schools.

Artifact Analysis

In reviewing the artifacts, if a word or phrase was noted more than three times, it was labeled as important. This was a somewhat arbitrary designation, but it appeared to me that a topic was considered important by the school if it was mentioned in some way at least that number of times; there is no support in the literature for what should or should not be considered important in artifact collection and it is therefore a choice of the researcher. If there was no mention of affective words or phrases, it was noted as missing. The matrix below was used to code my interpretations of the artifacts. Pictures and notes were taken at each school and my interpretations of them entered into the matrix. This

process allowed for coding to occur for each school regarding the artifacts in the building.

Table 4

Artifact Matrix

	School One	School Two	School Three	School Four
1. Artifacts located in the hallway				
2. Artifacts located in the main entrance				
3. Artifacts in the gifted education classroom				
4. Content within artifacts				
5. Affective theme(s)				
6. Specific words related to				

affective learning opportunities				
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Interview Analysis

Each interview was transcribed. While reading through the transcriptions, significant words were highlighted and notes on possible identified themes were made in the margins. After the initial coding process, I reread the transcripts to refine my identification of emerging patterns. I classified the themes into categories including experience, affective knowledge, availability of resources, and perceptions of current work. These classifications were based on my interpretations of affective instruction. I also looked for specific recurring words in my artifact analysis. Below is the matrix I used to sort and code interview information.

Table 5

Interview Matrix

Interviewees	Background	Affective Needs of Students	Affective Knowledge	Availability of Resources	Perceptions of administrators beliefs	Perceptions of current work
Ryan*						
Amy*						
Gail*						

*pseudonym to protect anonymity

These categories were based on the research questions. The affective needs and knowledge categories are directly related to the primary research question. The remaining three categories relate to information that can answer the three subquestions.

Curricular Analysis

The curricular analysis proved to be a difficult endeavor due to a relative lack of such curricula to examine and analyze. This will be further discussed in later chapters. A matrix was used to organize data collected from the portions of the interview that were related to curricula as well as the curriculum itself. Below is the matrix used to collect data regarding the curricular resources used by the three gifted education teachers.

Table 6

Curricular Analysis Matrix

Type/name of resource		
Which school(s) is utilizing the resource?		
How is it used?		
What topics are being discussed?		
Who is using it?		
Individual or group use?		

Data Analysis Procedures

The data analysis procedure for all data sources utilized Robert Yin's (2103) five levels of questions. Yin noted that relevant questions can occur at any of five levels (p. 90).

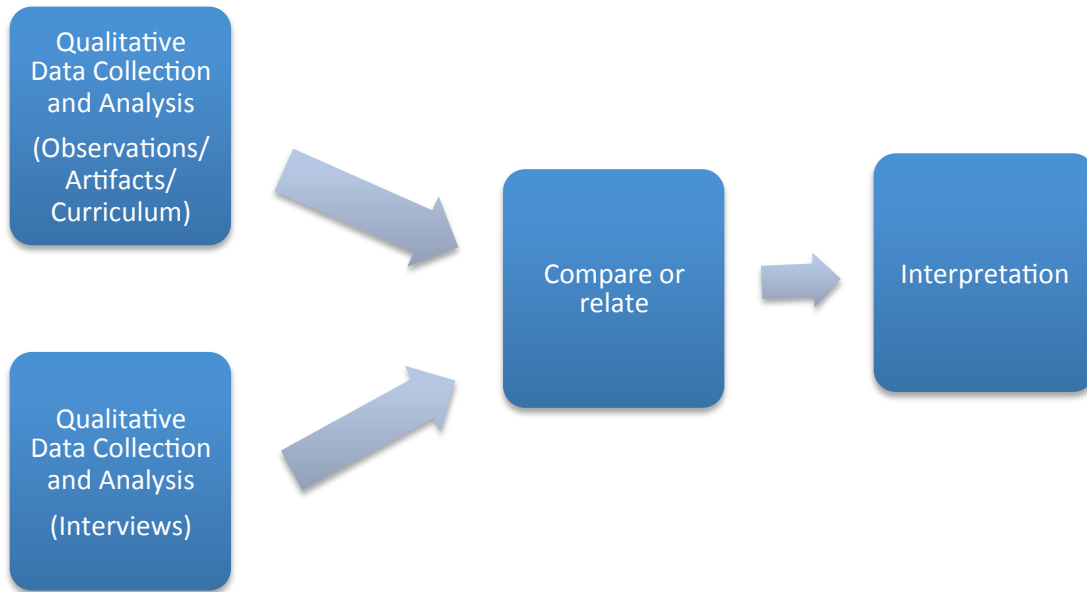
- Level 1: Questions asked of specific participants
- Level 2: Questions asked of the individual case
- Level 3: Questions asked of the pattern of findings
- Level 4: Questions asked of an entire study
- Level 5: Normative questions about policy recommendations and conclusions, going beyond the narrow scope of the study looking for broader implications.

Level 1 questions were utilized to analyze the interviews, while level 2 and 3 questions were utilized to guide artifact and curricular analysis. Level 4 questions were used to inform the discussion of the findings, while level 5 questions guided the implication and future research sections. Specifically, the individual participants were sources of Level 1 data, while the study settings were the sources of Level 2 (case site/setting) and Level 3 (patterns within and among the cases). The Level 4 questions were those posed by the study itself, while Level 5 questions arose from the study's findings.

The figure below describes the general process by which the data were analyzed.

Figure 7

Qualitative Data Analysis Process



Each component of the study was coded for thematic analysis as per the recommendations of Creswell (2013). Artifacts were also classified and coded to find themes and “look for correspondence between these categories” (Creswell, 2013, p. 199). Patterns and emergent themes were identified from analyzing the data (Creswell, 2013). The data matrices from each school were examined to note emerging themes and patterns.

The following tables display the questions at each of Yin’s five levels of questioning.

Table 7

Level 1: Questions asked of specific participants

Target	Questions
Gifted education teachers	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. What is the number one factor that contributes to healthy affective development?2. How do you share information regarding affective issues with your gifted adolescent students (students on Advanced Learning Plans)?3. How do you find resources regarding affective issues to share with gifted adolescents?4. Is there a school wide or district wide plan/curriculum for teaching affective issues at the secondary level?5. What is your background in teaching affective topics to gifted adolescents?6. Is there collaboration between adults in the building or district regarding how to share information regarding affective issues with gifted adolescents?

Table 8*Level 2: Questions asked of the individual case*

Target	Questions
Analysis of all data sources from each school (interviews, artifacts, and curriculum)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What did the interviews and artifacts convey regarding affective learning opportunities for gifted adolescents in the school settings?• How did the data support or disprove the assumptions made regarding school missions?• Is the affective information differentiated for gifted adolescents?• What role do administrators play in ensuring affective learning opportunities?

Table 9*Level 3: Questions asked of the pattern of findings*

Target	Questions
Analysis of all data sources (interviews, artifacts, and curriculum)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Did the pattern of findings suggest commonalities between data gathered from all three sources?• Did the pattern of findings suggest further data needed to elaborate on the problem in practice?

Table 10

Level 4: Questions asked of the entire study

Target	Questions
Analysis of all data sources (interviews, artifacts, and curriculum)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Were affective learning opportunities in place for all gifted adolescents? • How were affective learning opportunities differentiated for gifted adolescents? • How are the findings related to the problem in practice?

Table 11

Level 5: Normative questions about policy recommendations and conclusions, going beyond the narrow scope of the study. Looking for broader implications.

Target	Questions
Analysis of all data sources (interviews, artifacts, and curriculum)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are the findings generalizable? • Did the findings support the research questions? • Did the findings support a change in practice to elevate affective learning opportunities for gifted

adolescents?

- Has the study provided insight into the affective learning opportunities for gifted adolescents?
-

Conclusion

This qualitative multiple case study employed three sources of data: curricula, artifacts, and interviews. The three sources of data allowed for cross-comparison of results within and among the individual cases. This served as a means of data triangulation, in that it was possible thereby for the researcher to identify any anomalies or outliers in the data. This chapter explored the methodology used in this case study as well as the analysis process. The researcher's data analyses suggest answers to the research questions, as "Insights gleaned from case studies can directly influence policy, practice, and future research" (Merriam, 1998). The following chapter will provide the results of the data collection from the interviews, artifacts, and curricular resources.

Chapter Four - Results

Introduction

This chapter contains the findings of the study. Information regarding the artifacts found embedded within each school and the responses from the teachers interviewed for this study will be discussed. Findings that relate to all of the schools will be presented and summarized and the data as it pertains to the research questions will be presented.

This study examined four secondary schools in a rural Colorado school district. U.S. public schools have a long history of giving schools mascots to represent the spirit of the school. In that vein, I'm going to assign an animal to each school as it relates to the findings of the study. The schools were chosen according to their mission statements. Two schools emphasizing affective issues in their missions were selected and two emphasizing academic achievement in their missions were selected. School One (the Rams) and School Three (the Chameleons), had mission statements that reflected the importance of affective content, such as relationships and communication. School Two (the Elephants) and School Four (the Ducklings) emphasized academic excellence as the most important aspect of their mission statement (the numbering of the schools is based on the order in which I visited them for the artifact examination and the interviews and does not imply any kind of hierarchy). It was the my hope that the schools expressing affective topics in their mission statements would be more adept and open to supporting affective learning opportunities and affective goal setting. It was unknown if schools

expressing academic mission statements would deter or have no effect on affective learning opportunities and affective goal setting.

Participants

The three participants comprise the team of gifted educators that support the secondary schools throughout the participating district. The teachers have multiple roles within the district. They were interviewed about their specific work with secondary students in regard to teaching affective learning opportunities.

Ryan. Ryan wears several hats in his district. “I teach one pullout class, one period a day at [the Elephant school],” explained Ryan. “I am the secondary curriculum director and gifted education director. I have been a secondary counselor and internship coordinator in the past. I am also in a doctoral program for curriculum and instruction, specializing in gifted education. All of these experiences have helped me form a better understanding of how to better meet the affective needs of gifted adolescents, but I still learn new things on a regular basis. Having a variety of tools and approaches has proven to be very useful, since students can respond very differently to the same approach.”

Gail. Gail is a gifted education teacher and coordinator specializing in secondary education. She works daily with the Rams as well as other duties throughout the district. Gail has been able to work with the Rams for several years, and stated that at this point, she is “working to improve gifted education and whether the teachers do it or I do it. I am the resource to keep things rigorous. They have been receptive and the cluster model should help.” Gail’s background has been helpful in her position as a gifted education

teacher and coordinator. “I have a background in social work and counseling. I am also a mom of a gifted learner. I was a summer program counselor at the John Hopkins Summer Program and have been a teacher, social worker and taught senior seminar. I’ve facilitated many discussion groups in my career, and find this an important activity for gifted learners.”

Amy. Amy is the newest member of the secondary gifted education team. She works daily with the Chameleons and serves as one of the secondary gifted education coordinators in the district. “I have a background in school counseling and teaching at the secondary level.” Amy is concentrating on building relationships with her students and staff. “This is my first year working in this position, so I am building relationships and trying to learn the principals’ views.” She has found that sharing information with gifted adolescents varies greatly depending on which school she is working in at the time.

Mission Statements

The study examined four secondary school settings to assess what opportunities are available that contribute to gifted adolescents’ understanding of affective learning. The school district was chosen based on the common interest of the community partner and the researcher. The district has six secondary schools. The schools were chosen via the researcher’s evaluation of their websites and mission statements. Two schools that expressed strong academic objectives on their website and mission statement and two schools that expressed strong affective objectives on their website and mission statement were selected. An assumption was made that schools emphasizing affective topics in their

mission statements would be found to have more artifacts and curricular resources available within the school.

The table below describes the mission statements for each school, the animal name given to each school, and if they present an academic or affective focus. This data elaborates on the researcher's evaluation of the schools as affective- or academic-oriented.

Table 12

School Mission Statements/Animal Mascots

Secondary School Sites	Animal Name & Explanation	Mission Statements
School One Affective Focus	<u>Rams</u> Steadfast and determined to stay focused to their goal of providing affective support to all students.	Work Hard And Be Kind At **** We Believe : That Kids Come First : That We Are Stronger Working Together Than Alone : That A Smile And Hello Go A Long Way
School Two Academic Focus	<u>Elephants</u> Strong, steady and persistent as they work toward their academic mission.	STAY THE COURSE "Stay the course" originated as a nautical metaphor on maintaining a constant, unaltering course while navigating. **** and its students will navigate this course to pursue goals and academic excellence

School Three Affective Focus	<u>Chameleons</u> Flexible and engaged in various projects.	Within a challenging and joyful learning environment where relationships come first, **** School will leverage quality teaching, character education and a rigorous curriculum to inspire a lifetime of learning.
School Four Academic Focus	<u>Ducklings</u> School Four is in an emergent stage regarding gifted education support.	STAY THE COURSE "Stay the course" originated as a nautical metaphor on maintaining a constant, unaltering course while navigating. **** and its students will navigate this course to pursue goals and academic excellence.

**Note that the Elephants and the Ducklings are separate schools, but share a campus and mission statement. They have a separate staff and different focus from the gifted teachers that support the two schools based on differing needs of the students.*

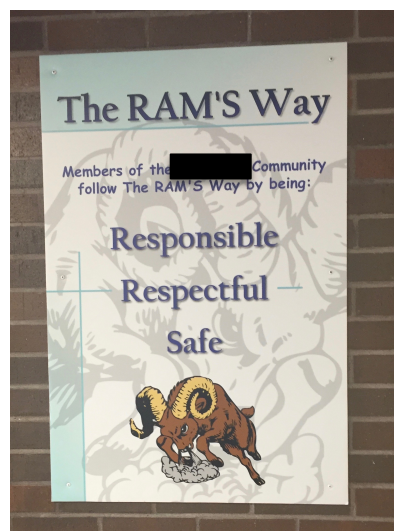
The two mission statements that appear to emphasize affective topics refer to general affective characteristics and qualities such as positive relationships, happiness, positive communication and sense of community. The mission statements don't qualify which specific affective topics they are referring, and it is difficult to infer what the underlying meaning the creators of the mission statements discussed while they were creating the statements.

Rams - School One

As I walked in the front entrance of the Ram school, I was greeted with walls covered in posters and colorful butcher paper-covered walls. The poster below was hung in the entryway as well as in hallways and most classrooms. It states the three words that guide the vision of the school and remind students to be good citizens.

Figure 8

Entryway Poster



Ryan, one of the participating gifted education teachers, was taking me to the schools on this particular day. The principal offered to give us a tour, so we joined him in the office. He immediately apologized for the deteriorating building and facilities and noted they were working to find funds to update the facilities. He even took us into a classroom to show us how you can place a ball at one end of the room and it will roll to the other without being pushed because the floor is so slanted. We laughed that it was a great way to teach science lessons to students. I thought to myself that the condition of the school facilities might in some way have an influence on its efforts toward affective teaching.

As we walked back into the entryway, the principal noted that “Building positive relationships and school community is a goal of the school administration this year.” He expressed his belief that social and emotional learning is imperative with adolescents and explained that this goal was the basis for the creation of the school mission statement:

Work Hard And Be Kind

At **** We Believe

: That Kids Come First

: That We Are Stronger Working Together Than Alone

: That A Smile And Hello Go A Long Way

The principal spoke about all students needing social and emotional learning, but did not delineate the specific needs of gifted learners or affective topics other than relationships and behaviors related to positive communication. To emphasize the importance of social and emotional learning, the Rams have implemented a school-wide initiative around affective growth and positive communication between students. Due to

this initiative, there were many displays regarding positive relationships and a culture of acceptance. The climate reflected an openness to discuss affective content.

The Ram's principal noted that he works with his school team to decide how to share social and emotional learning with students throughout the year. This year, they have instituted a program in which a selected group of students meets on a regular basis to create projects for the school to heighten awareness regarding positive school climate and relationships. The students were selected through a teacher nomination process. The criteria used included the students' leadership qualities, work ethic, and personality. I did not determine how many gifted learners were in the group or what sort of training the students received during the process. Their job was to elicit positive interactions among the students and work to make all students feel included and engaged in the school community. The students met and created school-wide projects such as the one shown in the picture below. This project involved writing positive and inspirational comments on sticky notes and attaching them to each locker. Sticky notes with positive comments such as "You are Amazing!" were stuck to every locker. This is an example of how the school employed its gifted students to assist in its goal of affective learning. It also may have had an effect on the gifted students' affective goal setting, though I could not ascertain that directly without asking those students.

Figure 9

Sticky Note Project



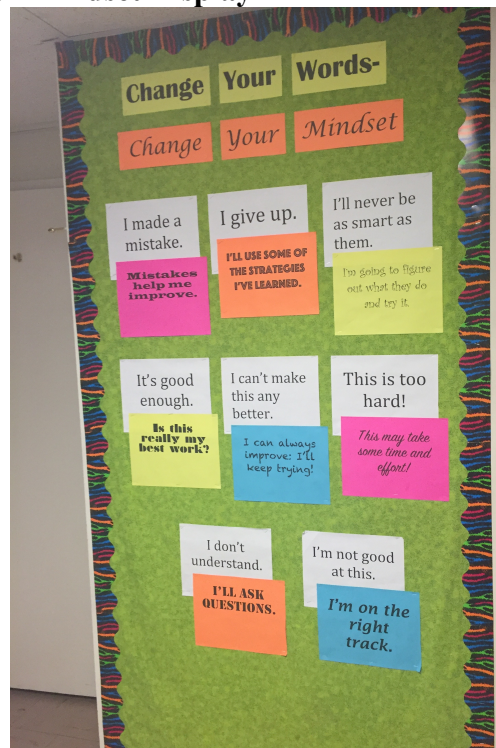
Every hallway was adorned with butcher paper-covered walls and displays. Some of the artifacts in the Ram school included student-created posters and notes with positive messages regarding relationships and communication. Some shared student work, while other displays were of information related to general affective topics. The affective elements showcased in these exhibits were relationships and self-awareness. The student created artifacts were more personalized and it made the school feel more warm and

inviting. Strategies were shared in some of the artifacts, but most examples were simply positive sayings.

The picture below describes strategies students can utilize to shift their mindset from fixed to growth. It was unclear if the students had been given specific lessons regarding the topic of mindset. The display below shows strategies to use words differently in order to create a growth mindset.

Figure 10

Growth Mindset Display



Gail is the gifted education teacher at the Ram school and was working with a small group of students when we visited her room. Gail shared that the main factor contributing to healthy affective development is “for my students to feel heard and

understood.” Her room was set up in a way that chairs were positioned in groups to allow for discussion and collaboration. The walls were adorned with inspirational quotes and posters. Gail has a background in social work, so she has an immense amount of past experience to pull from.

The poster from the entryway of the school was located at the entry of her classroom. This display reminds students to be aware of their actions while on social media—this is implied by the symbols for Facebook, Twitter, and other social media platforms, with which most adolescents are very familiar.

Figure 11

Social Media Display



To find time in the schedule to work on affective content with her gifted students, Gail has worked with the parents and principal to provide for affective learning:

I am using SENG discussion protocols during lunch groups every Tuesday. Parents of the students sign up to provide lunch and the students choose to participate. I have about twenty to twenty five students attend and discuss a variety of affective topics including how to deal with anxiety, stress and perfectionism. It is telling that the students will give up their free time to spend it talking about these topics. It shows that they really need this type of learning and opportunity to talk about what is going on with them. (Gail, Interview Session, 2016)

Gail was trained to facilitate SENG discussion groups by a high school gifted education teacher in Boulder, Colorado. Gail learned about the discussion groups while attending the Colorado Association of Gifted and Talented Conference (CAGT).

Gail noted that the leadership at the Ram school has allowed her to provide more learning opportunities for her gifted learners.

With the support of our district GT Director, I worked with the principal to set up cluster grouping in eighth grade. The principal and entire school has been very accommodating to this situation and it has worked well. This clustering allows the school to offer a double English Language Arts period every Friday in which I can push in and teach lessons pertaining to affective needs of gifted learners. (Gail, Interview Session, 2016)

Gail has a classroom at the school, but the majority of the instruction she provides to students is given while she is “pushing in” to classrooms. Pushing in means providing

instruction to students while they are in another teacher's class. This can be in the form of co-teaching, small group instruction, or individual instruction. This is a common practice in the field of special education and is becoming more accepted in gifted education.

Gail also shared that she has been able to build a positive rapport with the administration at the Ram school because she has worked with them for many years. Her children attended the school so she has had experience as a teacher and parent at the school. "Over the past couple of years I have worked with the administration to bring in mentors to work with the gifted adolescents. I feel these mentors help students understand values and gain different perspectives. It is important for the students to value different perspectives." Most recently, Gail was able to find two engineers who come in on a regular basis to work with students interested in robotics. "The community piece is very important to me," Gail noted, "it helps students understand the bigger picture of what is out in the world. Students need intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and offering them opportunities to learn in different ways can strengthen both of those types of motivation."

Ram Findings

The Ram school provides the entire school population with resources and exposure to affective learning involving positive school climate. The principal has worked with the gifted education department to cluster students in one grade level to allow for affective learning opportunities related to the specific needs of gifted learners. Affective resources are created and utilized by individual teachers and are not applied

systematically among all gifted classes. Affective learning is often embedded within other activities or taught during a “lunch bunch” group once a week.

Elephants - School Two

Ryan (the gifted education teacher introduced earlier in this chapter) accompanied me to all of the school visits. The entrance to the Elephant school reminded me of a 1970s style of school building, with hallways made of large brick painted a stark white color. The Elephant school is a middle school that shares a campus with the Ducklings, which is a high school. There are words painted around the ceiling of the common area describing the motto of the school. Although the entryway and hallway is empty of artifacts and seems rather stark, the school is clean and well kept. The figures below denote the school rules painted in various locations within the school and the continuation of the school mission statement posted in the hallways and classrooms.

Figure 12

School Rules

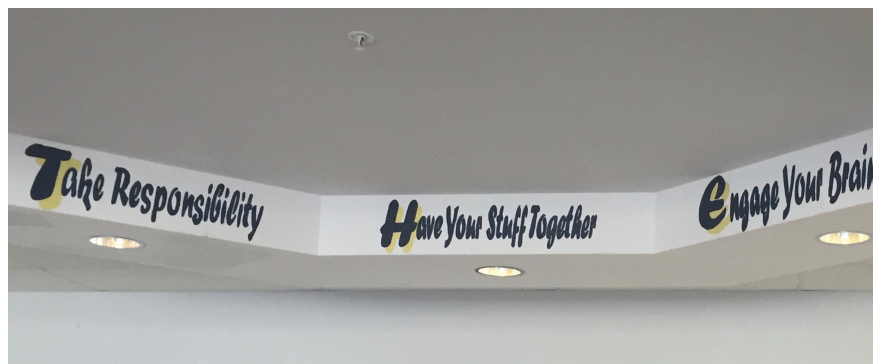
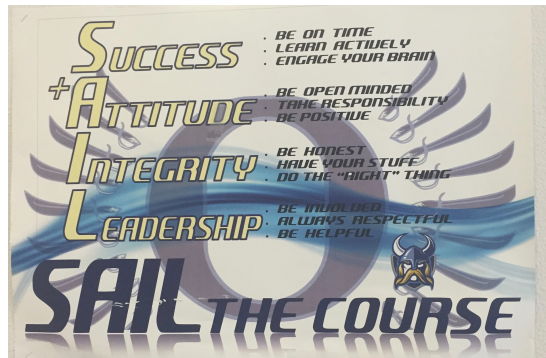


Figure 13

Mission Statement Poster



A man with a warm smile approached us. He introduced himself as the science teacher and asked if we would like to see his classroom. He was excited to share what he had been working on with his students. His classroom was next to Ryan's room, and it appeared that the two teachers had a strong rapport. They spoke easily about students they both worked with and the differentiation occurring in the science classroom. The science teacher had many posters on the wall related to science education and topics, but perhaps surprisingly, nothing related to affective topics. After the science teacher shared with us what he was working on with the students, his tone became serious and he asked the gifted teacher about one of the students they both teach. He was concerned because he had noticed some behaviors expressed by the student and wanted to understand if this was a characteristic of the student's giftedness. From the ease of conversation and information shared, it was apparent that comparing observations and asking advice about

students they both taught was commonplace with these two teachers.

As we walked next door to Ryan's classroom, he noted that "The teachers really care about the students here and want them to succeed both academically and in life." When we walked into Ryan's classroom, I noticed that chairs were set up in an open arrangement so all students could see each other during a discussion. The next aspect of the room I noticed was the student work covering all of the walls. The classroom was adorned with student work reflecting not only academic, but affective content. Examples of the student work are shown in figures 15, 16, and 17.

Many of the artifacts from the Elephant school were created by students in the gifted education classroom during activities to promote self-awareness. Ryan explained that each student had a section of the wall and could post any of their work that they would like to share with the class. There were pictures the students had drawn as well as samples of writing and photographs. Below are examples of some of the posters and artwork in Ryan's room.

Figure 14

Classroom Poster

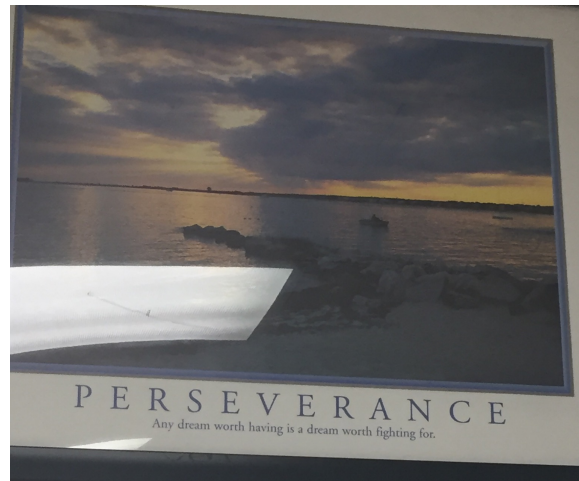
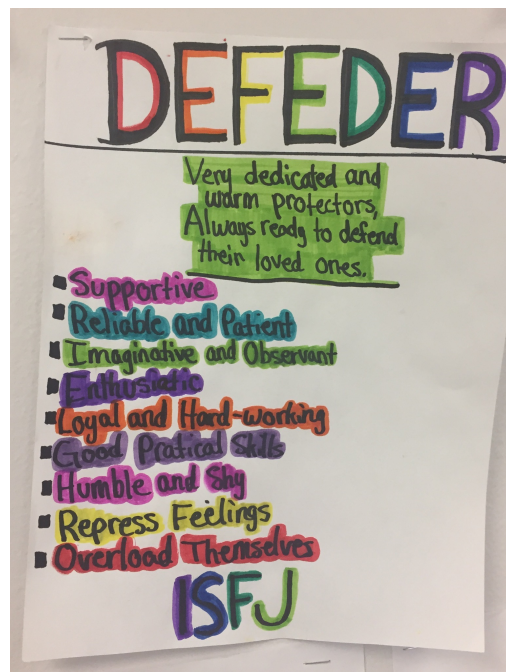


Figure 15

Student Poster



Ryan shared that:

Dealing with social and emotional needs is a challenge, and trying to find the time and curriculum that interests all participants in a given class can be incredibly difficult. One thing that I have found to be effective is to allow my students to each decorate a section of the wall with things they like and things that interest them. As part of this wall, there are social-emotional components, including the results of their personality tests and affective goals they have made for themselves for the year. By doing this, each student has a safe space that is unique to them, and they enjoy being able to decorate their own safe space. (Interview Session, 2016)

Figure 16

Student Drawing #1

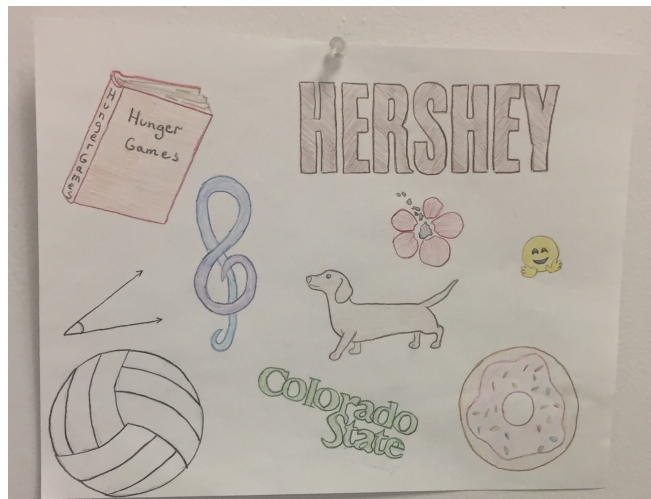


Figure 17

Student Drawing #2

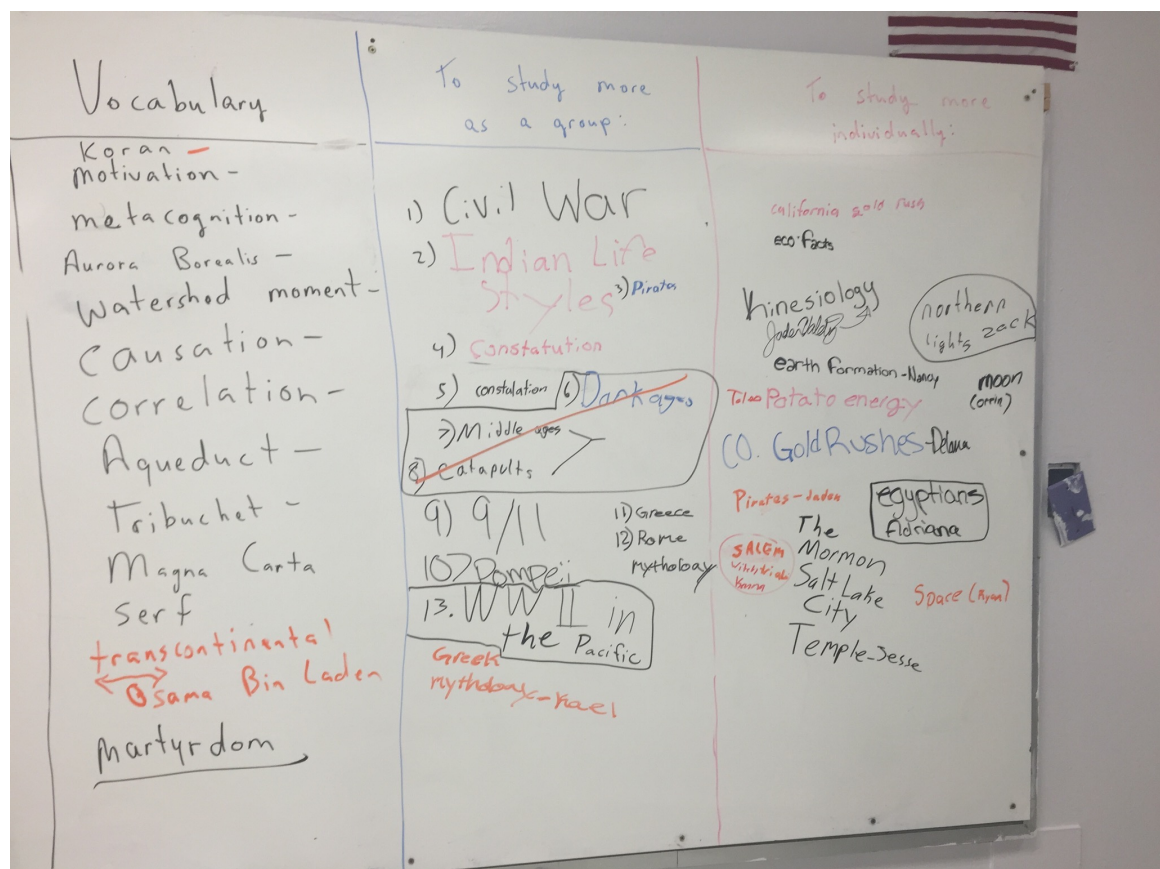


Ryan’s whiteboard was filled with topics of interest chosen by his students. Ryan observed that allowing the students to be a part of the process helps to create engagement and motivation. Ryan believes that “The students need an adult in school they can connect with. Someone the kid trusts.” He feels that allowing them to have more of a voice in the creation of learning will help them accomplish more in their lives. To support affective goal creation, Ryan shares information about topics that his gifted adolescents have dealt with in the past. Some of the main topics include depression, anxiety, and perfectionism. Ryan noted that “all of these topics appear to be more intense in nature

with his gifted students”; also, that helping the student to create affective goals at the beginning of the school year is difficult when he doesn’t yet know the student very well and hasn’t had the opportunity to discuss various affective topics. The left side of the board shows vocabulary related to lessons being discussed in the class. The middle of the board is a space where students share topics they would like to study as a group. The right side of the board consists of topics students would like to study individually.

Figure 18

Ryan’s White Board



Ryan utilizes Jean Sunde Peterson’s books, “The Essential Guide to Talking with Gifted Teens” (2008) and “Talk with Teens About What Matters to Them” (2011) to find resources for his students.

Table 13

Curricular Resources

Ryan’s Curricular Resources	Resource Topics
<p>1. Jean Sunde Peterson, Ph.D.</p> <p>Activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ “The Essential Guide to Talking with Gifted Teens” (2008) ○ “Talk with Teens About What Matters to Them” (2011) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identity • Stress • Relationships • Feelings • Family • The Future

The Elephants allow gifted students to engage in a pullout class, which often addresses affective topics, but the school as a whole did not appear to address affective needs. As I walked through the school, the hallways were fairly bare and it had an institutional feel, but all of the staff members we encountered were friendly and wanted to discuss students and their needs. The only opportunity for gifted students to partake in specific affective learning opportunities appeared to be in the one period taught by the gifted teacher. Ryan noted that he struggles to find sufficient affective curriculum that works well with all students in his class. Ryan shared that the district as a whole does not

have a good method to share information with gifted adolescents due to time constraints and the diverse needs of the students.

The types of affective needs vary greatly among the students, which makes it difficult to share pertinent information regarding affective topics on an individual basis. Before starting my doctoral program in gifted education, I had no idea where to find resources, but now I can find a few things. I've found that there is little information that you don't put together yourself. (Ryan, Interview Session, 2016)

When asked if there is collaboration between adults in the building or district regarding how to share information regarding affective issues with gifted adolescents, Ryan stated that it varied depending on the individual school; some administrators in the district do not believe that gifted learners have unique affective needs to be addressed.

Elephant Findings

Ryan, the gifted education teacher, utilizes a pullout method to teach gifted learners. During this period, affective learning occurs based on students suggesting topics to discuss. His two resource books are used to find activities that teach about the affective topic chosen. Both books are written by the same author, Jean Sunde Peterson. One emphasizes general affective topics related to adolescents, while the second is written specifically to address affective topics related to gifted adolescents. There are no school wide affective learning opportunities. Posters throughout the school expose students to aspects of positive school climate and expectations.

Chameleons - School Three

As I pulled into the parking lot at the Chameleon school, a rush of exuberant students flooded out the front door. A group of boys dressed in school colors ran out to the adjacent football field where the coach was waiting, while others headed to waiting cars and buses. As I walked into the entryway, I noted that there were many posters and wall decorations hanging in the hallway and office. The posters were varied and shared information regarding the school mission and happenings at the school. Many of the artifacts included adult-created posters describing school expectations and mission statements. The hallways had similar posters showing positive interactions between students. No artifacts were noted that dealt with specific affective topics such as anxiety, depression, perfectionism, or stress. The following three posters were in the hallways of the Chameleon school. The poster below gives information regarding a suicide hotline and where to find help.

Figure 19

Suicide Prevention Poster



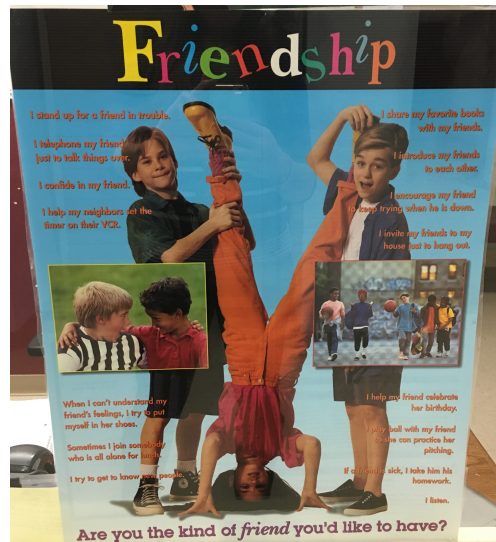
Figure 20

Relationship Poster



Figure 21

Friendship Poster



Access to the entirety of the facility was limited in this school due to multiple events occurring during my visit. I was able to obtain most of my information regarding this visit from Amy, the gifted teacher at this school. Amy explained that “At [the Chameleon school], the gifted students are placed on the same team. This is my first year working with this school, so I am building relationships and trying to learn the principal’s views. I am learning that different people have very different views of gifted education and what the students need. I am working to provide professional development to the staff, so they have the most up to date information regarding the needs of gifted learners.”

Amy noted that “An area I am working to improve is the teachers’ understanding of what gifted learners need and the true differentiation they need. Some of the teachers feel that we ‘stole’ all of the good kids and it’s not fair that they are all on the same team.

They are upset that all the ‘good’ kids are together. I have had to deal with one principal that makes the decisions and doesn’t agree with the advice of our (GT) team.” Amy is working with the administration to form a consensus on gifted education. She is concentrating on offering professional development to assist the staff in understanding the needs of gifted learners. Her background in counseling helps her understand how to work best with her students and the staff.

Amy noted that she “pushes into the teams to provide affective learning. I am working with the director and other coordinators to create proactive learning opportunities for the gifted students.” She feels that gifted adolescents need support to build a confident and solid affective base. “Telling students how they feel doesn’t work; it’s my job to advocate and help facilitate opportunities for students to understand affective issues,” says Amy. “I need to establish a trusting relationship prior to sharing information.”

The Chameleons have a gifted coordinator available for part of the day, but did not appear to have affective issues as its primary focus. The school has some artifacts related to school climate and they cluster gifted students on the same team, but they do not have a school wide plan to address affective needs (Amy’s plans are not being implemented by anyone other than herself at present). It appears that the school has other initiatives that are taking priority at this time and it has been difficult to incorporate affective learning opportunities into the schedule.

Chameleon Findings

The Chameleons have clustered gifted learners into teams and the gifted teacher pushes in to teach lessons regarding positive school climate that are utilized school wide. It is not a curriculum that attends to the specific needs of gifted learners. Amy is new to the school this year and has found that the administration takes a talent development ideology in regard to gifted learners. At this time, they do not feel that gifted learners have unique affective needs. This point of view suggests that a lack of expression of affective learning goals may mean that the school administration does not consider such goals a priority.

Ducklings - School Four

The Ducklings, the only high school in the study, is on the same campus as the Elephants. I tried to picture myself as a teenager walking through the halls and thinking about how it would feel as I looked around. Although the building was clean, it felt cold and unwelcoming. As I walked in the entrance, there were a few posters explaining the mission of the school and school happenings. The walls did not have any other artifacts on them and the hallways were stark white with an institutional feel.

This is the first year that high schools in the district have had weekly support from the gifted education department, so finding the best way to facilitate instruction for their gifted students is still in progress. Establishing a common understanding and programming options for the gifted students at the Duckling school appear to be in the initial stages of development. The gifted education team is building capacity at the

secondary level and working to align sixth through twelfth grade support.

Ryan and Gail both work with the high school as they transition to having gifted education support. Ryan noted that he shares information with the high school counselor when asked, but there is not a consistent plan of support. There is nothing set up to address specific affective needs of gifted learners. The school counselor works to address relationship needs with all students in the school. Ryan tries to advocate, but time constraints affect the opportunities he has to work with the students, as the administrative components of his other duties take up his entire workday.

As noted in Chapter Three, Ryan stated that the gifted education teachers are working proactively at the district level to create affective learning opportunities. They meet weekly to discuss the needs of the students in the district and ways to best service all gifted students. The gifted teachers also offer professional development opportunities to school staff members regarding gifted learners. “There is collaboration within the gifted education team, but it does not necessarily transfer throughout the rest of the secondary schools,” Ryan shared.

This poster was displayed in the hallway. The following poster reminds students to be self-aware and make smart choices. The third poster reminds students to think before they speak/text/etc. and is displayed throughout the school.

Figure 22

Teamwork Poster

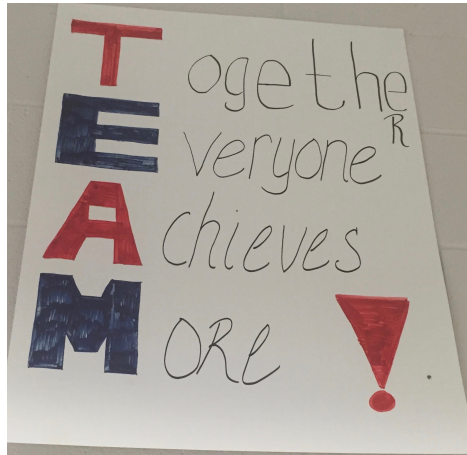


Figure 23

Choices Poster



Figure 24

Self-Awareness Poster



We really need to build capacity in our schools and get all of secondary, sixth through twelfth, aligned. If more of the educators in the building understand the needs of their gifted students, they will be able to support them when we are not available. The .5 position in the high school is new this year and the facilitation piece is still new, so we have a lot of work to do as we help students and adults understand what the gifted students need. (Interview Session, 2016)

Gail and Ryan have been working together to increase support at the high school level. Gail shared what she had been doing at the high school.

At the high school level, I am working with the counselor to offer individual proactive counseling. Teachers use referrals to find gifted students with intense behavioral needs. I already have six and it's only September! Then I can touch base with the student or the counselor meets with them. In the high school, I am working with the counselor to set targets for the ninth grade gifted students. I have only had one opportunity to meet with them this year. (Gail, Interview Session, 2016)

The Ducklings appeared to follow their mission of emphasizing academic excellence. There was relatively little mention of specific affective learning opportunities in the artifacts of the school. The school has a few posters related to positive school culture and excellence, but overall, the hallways are fairly blank. The school has access to a gifted coordinator but does not seem to spend time on specific affective learning opportunities for its students. Support from the gifted education team is new in the high school this year but has been in place for several years in the middle schools. Due to this situation, it is difficult to discern whether the lack of affective services is due to lack of support or the fact that the school is a high school and not a middle school.

Duckling Findings

The Duckling school is a high school and has never had gifted education support in the past. The gifted teachers and school administrators are currently in the process of establishing a plan to support gifted students. Therefore, the only affective support for gifted learners at the present time is referral to the counselor for specific needs. No

proactive elements are in place for gifted learners to be exposed to affective content at this time. There are posters in the school describing positive school climate and expectations.

Overall Findings Summary

The findings show that gifted teachers are working to support the affective needs at all four schools, but to varying degrees. There was no set curriculum utilized in any of the schools. The gifted teachers use pieces from different resources and past experiences to assist the gifted secondary students with affective learning.

The following table compares the findings at each school. Multiple pieces of evidence show that affective learning opportunities specific to gifted adolescents' needs are not provided proactively. At the Chameleon school, students are referred to the general counselor if they are having difficulty with affective issues, but there are no opportunities at this point for them to have proactive learning opportunities. Another example of reactive learning opportunities occurred at the Elephant school. When the students find an issue they are dealing with, the teacher pulls together information and lessons to discuss the topic. In every school examined in this study, there is no systemic curriculum being used to address the affective needs of gifted adolescents.

Table 14

Comparison of Participating Schools

	Mission Statements	Core Elements of Findings
Rams School One	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Affective focus in mission statement• Middle School	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• School-wide general affective initiative• Many artifacts to support positive school climate, but not specific affective topics• Strong support from the administration
Implications <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Continued professional development for educators will allow for increased understanding and support for gifted adolescents• With support from the administration, the gifted teacher plans to continue increasing support to gifted adolescents		
Elephants School Two	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Academic focus in mission statement• Middle School	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Daily pullout class for gifted adolescents• Few artifacts to support affective topics
Implications <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gifted teacher plans to continue building relationships with other teachers and administration to allow for increased collaboration.		
Chameleons School Three	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Affective focus in mission statement• Middle School	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Some artifacts to support positive school climate• Gifted teacher is having difficulty gaining access to students due to varying views of administrators and teachers as well as multiple initiatives taking precedence at the school.

Implications <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The gifted teacher plans to continue building relationships and offering professional development to help shift the thinking of educators and administrators in the building. 		
Ducklings School Four	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Academic focus in mission statement High School 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> First year of support from the gifted education team, so support is still in the planning stage. Few artifacts to support positive school climate
Implications <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continued professional development for educators and administration Collaboration with administration to create support plan 		

Conclusion

As the four components of this case study were examined, an interesting picture of each school began to appear. In the analysis, four themes emerged that supported the purpose of this study: varying understanding of educators in regard to the needs of gifted adolescents, limited time to teach affective content, limited availability of affective curricula for secondary students, and the focus of school wide affective instruction centering on positive school climate. The following chapter will delve into the themes, implications, and limitations of this study.

Chapter Five: Discussion, Limitations and Implications

Introduction

Psychological and neurological research have increased awareness regarding the need for gifted adolescents to receive affective learning opportunities in the academic realm. Research has found unique neurological aspects of the gifted brain both in form and function (Sousa, 2009; Tetreault et al., 2016). Psychologically, the gifted adolescent reacts to stimuli in different ways than the typical adolescent (Daniels & Piechowski, 2009, Galbraith & Delisle, 2011, Peterson, 2008). This means that gifted adolescents have different affective needs than their typical peers. Unfortunately, it appears that there are still misconceptions at the school level regarding the affective needs of gifted adolescents (Rivero, 2010). Through this study, I examined where and how schools offered affective learning opportunities to assist gifted adolescents with their unique needs. My hope was that through the process of conducting this case study, awareness would be increased at all levels in the field and administrators and teachers would be encouraged to collaborate and find ways to assist the gifted adolescents in their schools.

In this case study, I sought to examine affective learning opportunities for gifted adolescents in the secondary school setting. Chapter 5 discusses (1) links and analysis of data collected as related to research questions, (2) themes as related to the ZPD framework, (3) developing positive affective learning opportunities, (4) analysis of

school mission statements, (5) limitations of the study, (6) implications for practice and (7) implications for future research.

The themes that emerged utilizing triangulation during data analysis will be examined in regard to the research questions that guided this study. Themes will also be shared in relation to Lev Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (ZPD). This framework was selected due to its relevance in the construction of knowledge and supporting learners to allow for the most effective learning environment (Daniels, 1996). It can also be used to aid in the construction of curricula, as in one of the topics of this study. Examining the themes utilizing ZPD helps to guide the next steps in implementation.

As mentioned earlier, ZPD requires learners to be supported in a way that challenges them without pushing them past where they can cognitively or emotionally understand the material. It is imperative to find out what adults understand regarding the affective needs of gifted adolescents, as well as to know gifted adolescents' needs so that educators can stay within their ZPD regarding affective content. By examining three ways in which gifted adolescents receive affective content in this case study using triangulation, I was able to form understanding as to how information affects the learners' ZPD. Connections to the literature regarding the specific affective needs of gifted adolescents and the importance of having a foundation of understanding prior to creating affective goals will be embedded throughout this chapter.

Yin's (2013) Level 5 questions guide the forming of questions and implications in this chapter..

- Are the findings generalizable?
- Did the findings support the research questions?
- Did the findings support a change in practice to elevate affective learning opportunities for gifted adolescents?
- Has the study provided insight into the affective learning opportunities for gifted adolescents?

Analysis of Data in Relation to Research Questions

The research questions are repeated for convenience:

RQ1. How do secondary schools incorporate affective learning opportunities for gifted adolescents?

RQ1_a. What environmental factors are present to support/deter gifted adolescents' healthy affective development?

RQ1_b. What curricular factors are present to support gifted adolescents' healthy affective development?

RQ1_c. How do educators support/dissuade health affective development of gifted adolescents?

Primary Research Question Analysis

Results were evaluated by examining the aspects of the study as it related to each research question. The overarching research question examining how secondary schools

incorporate affective learning opportunities for gifted adolescents was used to guide the research study. Interview results assisted in answering the above question. The gifted education teachers who work directly with gifted adolescents answered a number of questions (see Appendix C) related to affective learning. All interviewees felt that the number one factor that contributes to healthy affective development is adolescents' need to feel heard and understood. This suggests an answer to the primary research question. Amy felt that "Students need a confident, solid base. I have worked with children in the past that were dealing with attachment disorder and I've found that a confident, strong foundation is what the children are missing. All children need to have this base. This allows them to build a confident and solid foundation." Often, this means having an adult in school they can connect with and trust.

In a similar vein, Ryan told a story about a custodian in his school who goes above and beyond for the students in his school:

The custodian doesn't see his job as simply to take care of the building, he instead views his responsibility as a caretaker of the school and the students who attend the school. Because he takes the extra time and makes the effort to get to know students, they respect him and clean up after themselves more than they would for a janitor they don't know anything about. The depth of relationships that he has formed with students is evidenced by the several times he has referred struggling students to counselors or to the MTSS team for assistance. Every student needs a

caring adult – and it doesn't matter if that caring adult is an administrator, a counselor, a teacher, or a support person. (Ryan, Interview Session, 2016)

This story suggests an answer to sub-question three. This may seem like a small thing, but it can be extremely impactful for the student. Jean Peterson (2008) adds, “gifted students wanted to be *known* – to be recognized for their individual worth and uniqueness, not just for their intellect or talent” (p.2). All of the interviewees have a background in counseling or social work, which they felt lends itself well to understanding and supporting the affective needs of their students.

Sub-Question One Discussion

The first sub-question examined what environmental factors are present to support/deter healthy affective development. Interview results and the artifact analysis assisted in answering this question. The environment in which a gifted student operates can affect all affective content areas including perfectionism, anxiety, depression, intensity, overexcitabilities/sensitivities, resiliency, stress, leadership, and emotional awareness related to relationships and communication (Cross, 2011; Galbraith & Delisle, 2011; Silverman, 2000; Peterson, 2008). Ryan, Gail, and Amy noted that there is no school-wide or district-wide plan for teaching affective content at a secondary level, but there are gifted education teachers in middle schools every day and in the high school for part of two days each week. This suggests that there is little attention paid to providing an optimal affective learning environment at these schools.

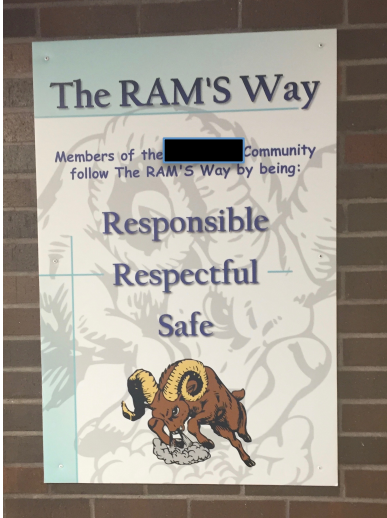
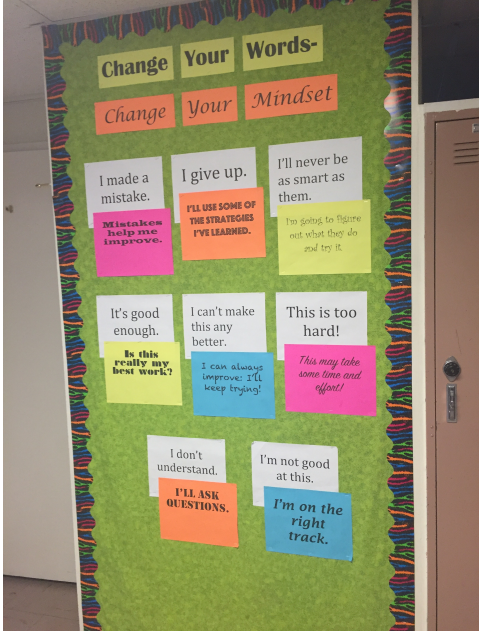
As I delved deeper into the meaning of this, I found that administrators' perceptions appear to play a key role in the type of support offered within the school. The Ram's principal shared that "Students at this age need support in all areas of their lives. If we work with them now, we can avoid some difficulties later." This principal went on to say that it was imperative to work with the whole child, beginning with his/her social and emotional needs. That being said, he was not aware of the unique affective needs of gifted learners, but felt that incorporating general social and emotional work with all students would help his gifted learners.



Through discussions with the gifted teachers, I found out that the other administrators deal with social and emotional learning differently. At the Chameleon school, they had several initiatives in place at the same time. One of them was around positive school climate, but the administrators at this school did not appear to be receptive to the gifted teacher's stance on the need for specific affective instruction for her students. The administrations at the Elephant and Duckling schools are concentrating on academic progress with their students and do not appear to make affective learning a priority.

At the Ram school, the principal and staff were working on affective learning opportunities, but it was not specific to the needs of gifted learners. Figures 8 through 11 show the types of artifacts found in the entryway and hallways of the Ram school.

Table 15

Ram Artifacts and Impact

Examples of Ram Artifacts	Explanation of Artifact	Impact
	<p>This was in the entryway of the school. The same poster is found throughout the school in hallways and classrooms.</p>	<p>Visual to set the stage so all students understand what is expected in the school.</p>
	<p>This display gives strategies to use words differently in order to create a growth mindset.</p>	<p>Visual reminder to give concrete examples of how to change words to change thinking.</p>

	<p>Sticky notes with positive comments such as “You are Amazing!” were stuck to every locker.</p>	<p>Visual reminder that everyone matters. Strong message because it is coming from peers.</p>
	<p>This display reminds students to be aware of their actions while on social media.</p>	<p>Visual reminder to be self-aware when using social media.</p>

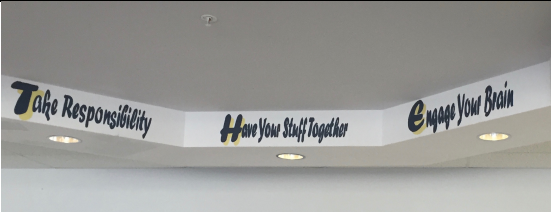
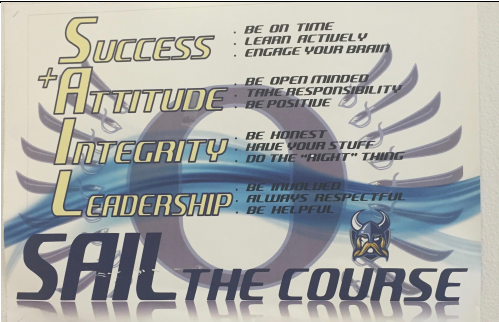
The Rams implemented a school wide initiative around social and emotional growth and positive communication between students. Due to this initiative, there were many displays and discussions regarding positive relationships and a culture of acceptance. They had a poster with examples of growth mindset, but no specific affective

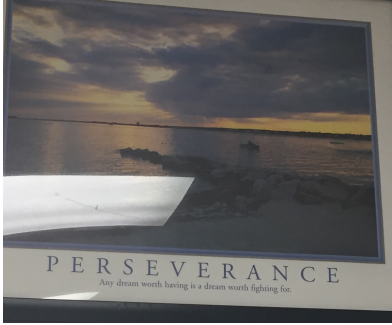
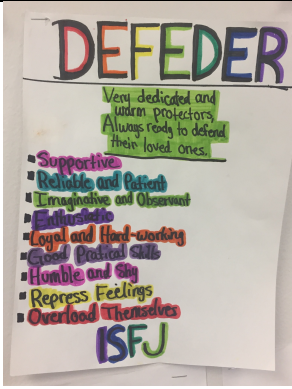
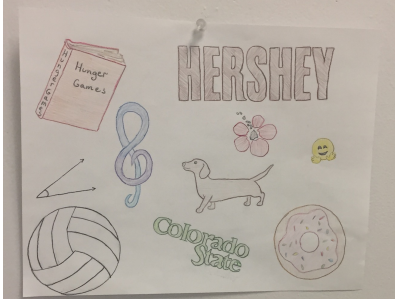
content was displayed. The climate reflected an openness to discuss affective topics. Gail also displayed posters and information in her room regarding affective learning.

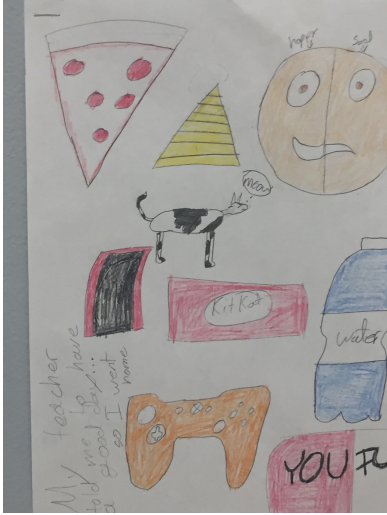
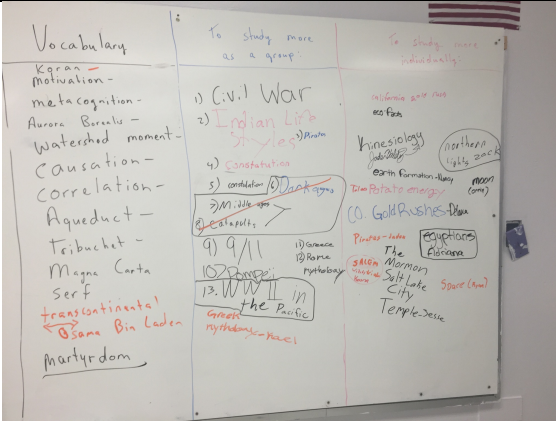
The Elephants did not display many artifacts in the hallway or on common area walls, but did have a few posters and some wall art regarding a positive school climate. As seen in figures 13 through 17, Ryan’s classroom was adorned with student work reflecting not only academic but also affective content.

Table 16

Elephant Artifacts and Impact

Examples of Elephant Artifacts	Explanation of Artifact	Impact
	<p>The school rules are painted in various locations within the school.</p>	<p>Visual reminder of school mission expectations.</p>
	<p>The continuation of the school mission statement is posted in the hallways and classrooms.</p>	<p>Visual reminder of school mission.</p>



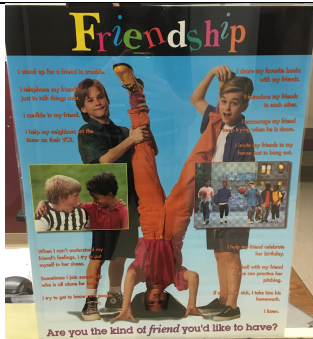
	<p>Example of types of posters located in the gifted education classroom.</p>	<p>Exposure to affective content.</p>
	<p>Student work in gifted education classroom.</p>	<p>Visual product from self-awareness activity.</p>
	<p>Student work in gifted education classroom.</p>	<p>Student project exploring personal interests and individual representation.</p>

	<p>Student work in gifted education classroom.</p>	<p>Student project exploring personal interests and individual representation.</p>
	<p>White board in the gifted education classroom.</p>	<p>This board is used as a brainstorm area for students and teachers to share information and topics of interest that students would like to explore.</p>

The Chameleons had some artwork and posters on the walls and common areas and again, they were related to a positive school climate. In Chapter Four, figures 18 through 20 show examples of the types of artifacts in the Chameleon school.

Table 17

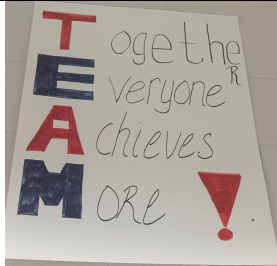
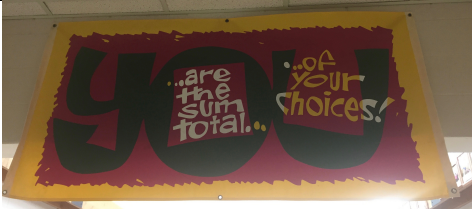
Chameleon Artifacts and Impact

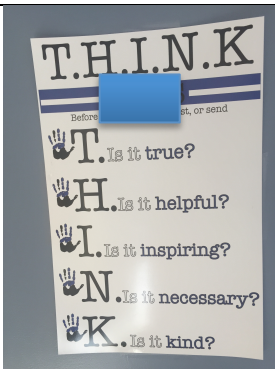
Examples of Chameleon Artifacts	Explanation of Artifact	Impact
	<p>This poster gives information regarding a suicide hotline and where to find help.</p>	<p>Awareness regarding the topic of suicide.</p>
	<p>This poster was located in a hallway.</p>	<p>Visual reminder that students need to be responsible for their choices.</p>
	<p>This poster was in a classroom and shares ways to be a good friend.</p>	<p>Visual sharing examples of being a good friend.</p>

The Ducklings had very little artwork and posters throughout the hallways and common areas. These displays related to a positive school climate and school happenings. As shown in Chapter Four, figures 21 through 23 show examples of the artifacts at the Duckling school.

Table 18

Duckling Artifacts and Impact

Examples of Duckling Artifacts	Explanation of Artifact	Impact
	This poster was displayed in the hallway.	Visual created by students reminding students of positive school climate.
	This poster was in the hallways and reminds students that they are responsible for their choices.	Visual reminder of self-awareness.

	<p>This poster reminds students to think before they speak/text/etc. and it is displayed throughout the school.</p>	<p>Another visual regarding self-awareness.</p>
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As the study unfolded, Ryan wondered whether having artifacts on the walls has an effect on the student. In the initial formulation of this question for the study, it was assumed that more artifacts in the school would correlate with the openness of the school to work with and discuss affective content. On the other end of the spectrum, does a lack of artifacts deter healthy affective development? It would be informative to find out from students if they feel that artifacts support their understanding or if the lack of artifacts deters their understanding of affective development. The only implications for the research sub-question (environment) are that teachers and administrators feel that a visual presentation of affective and academic goals is a positive addition to the school environment. It was not within the scope of this study, however, to measure the level of effectiveness of such a strategy.

There was an assumption that the schools having more artifacts related to affective content would be incorporating affective learning opportunities more often than

schools with little or no affective artifacts. After examining the other components of the study, it did appear that the school with the most artifacts in the school environment was the school that incorporated the most affective learning opportunities. This does not necessarily correlate with the affective learning opportunities gifted adolescents receive related to their specific affective needs. Topics related to asynchronous development, emotional intensities, perfectionism and anxiety were not discussed outside of the gifted education classrooms.

Sub-Question Two Discussion

The second sub-question examined curricular factors that were present to support healthy affective development. These factors were present to a greater degree in schools whose mission statements appeared to support affective learning. It is important to keep in mind that there is no reliable way to determine if a given curricular factor is beneficial in this regard, as any given curricular element is not administered in isolation. Ryan shared that the district does not utilize a specific affective curriculum for general education students or gifted education students and that they have few resources to support affective learning. The instruction around affective content is piecemeal and appears to depend on the knowledge base of the teacher. Ryan stated that:

We don't have a great way to teach affective topics at the moment. If students come up with a need, we will talk about it in class. If it's an individual need, I pass on the information. I use Jean Peterson's book, "Talk With Teens About Issues That Matter To Them," but it's difficult, there is just no good way. Dealing with

social and emotional needs is a challenge, and trying to find the time and curriculum that interests all participants in a given class can be incredibly difficult. (Ryan, Interview Session, 2016)

All three gifted education teachers noted that they find affective resources by doing individual research, including reading books on affective topics and attending conferences. The gifted education department in the district attempts to provide professional development opportunities for the gifted teachers regarding affective needs of the gifted. These two realities suggest that affective learning resources are rarely available directly from the schools. Some of the opportunities that are offered include sending these educators to gifted education conferences and collaborating with other gifted education teachers around the state. Amy and Gail visited twenty schools around the state to learn about lessons being utilized related to affective topics and obtain ideas of implementation. They were also encouraged to attend two gifted educator conferences during the school year. These conferences included the Colorado Association for Gifted and Talented (CAGT) state conference and the National Association of Gifted Children (NAGC) national conference. Gail noted that she has a background in social work, so she pulls information from her past experience to add to affective lessons. It seems odd, in a way, that substantial resources are expended in this manner but few or no resources are expended to directly provide affective learning opportunities for these teachers' students.

When asked if there was a school-wide or district-wide plan/curriculum for teaching affective issues at the secondary level, all of the interviewees noted that there is

very little information available that individual teachers do not put together themselves. These teachers often must craft their own curricula. This is the first year that a gifted education teacher has worked within the high school setting. Offering support at the high school level is going to be an important step to supporting gifted adolescents. Peterson (2008) explains that

gifted teens gain social skills through interacting with each other in the presence of a nonjudgmental adult. The teens learn what they and others have in common, learn to listen, gain experience in initiating, and responding to conversation, and become aware of how they are seen by other. (p.3)

This type of support would be considered scaffolding when examined through the lens of Vygotsky's ZPD. The nonjudgmental adult, to provide appropriate scaffolding, must understand the affective needs of gifted adolescents. This suggests a partial answer to sub-question two.

It was surprising that in the middle school with daily support, no specific affective curriculum was utilized. As Ryan noted, "I've found that there is little information that you don't put together yourself regarding affective curriculum for gifted students at the secondary level." The gifted education teachers pull resources from their experience as counselors to offer lessons related to affective content. Ryan explained that, "the district GT team meets once a week for two hours to discuss programming and needs within the department. This is when we brainstorm ways to share affective information with our

students.” This provides a further answer to sub-question two - that curricular support is provided at these schools primarily by the individual gifted education teachers.

At the Elephant school, Ryan pulls activities from the works of Peterson to address affective content. Peterson’s works include “Talk with Teens About What Matters to Them” (Peterson, 2011) and “The Essential Guide to Talking with Gifted Teens” (Peterson, 2008). Peterson offers ready-to-use discussions on topics including stress, identity, feelings, relationships, and family. At the Ram school, Gail utilizes discussion groups to work with the middle school students when time allows.

Sub-Question Three Discussion

The third sub-question examined how educators support/dissuade healthy affective support. Amy expressed that “Telling gifted adolescents doesn’t work, they need a relationship with adults they trust. I feel I need to be an advocate for students.” Building that relationship takes time and effort from all parties involved. Educators must understand that gifted adolescents process information in such a way that they can become easily overwhelmed and may express themselves in a way that is hard for adults to understand (Silverman, 2000; Sousa, 2009). In fact, the responses of the teachers suggest that these relationships might be the most important element of all in fostering affective learning—more important than environment or curriculum.

All interviewees noted that it is difficult to share information regarding affective content with their gifted adolescent students at this point in time. Ryan shared that the district “does not have a good way due to time constraints of general classroom teachers

and the diverse needs of the students.” The types of affective needs vary greatly among the students, which makes it difficult to share pertinent information regarding affective learning and development on an individual basis. Each gifted adolescent has unique affective needs (Cross, 2011; Silverman, 2000; Sousa, 2009). Adults must be flexible in their understanding that overexcitabilities and asynchrony play a large part in the daily lives of gifted adolescents.

At the Elephant school, the students meet with Ryan once a day for a pullout class and if they come up with a need as a class, Ryan will facilitate group sessions, utilizing Peterson’s resources. He passes on information and resources if he notices that individual students have specific issues. Peterson reminds us that “Gifted teens are often reluctant to ask for help, believing, like the adults, that they should be able to deal effectively with personal problems, difficult circumstances, low morale, or low motivation by themselves” (Peterson, 2008, p. 1). It is the responsibility of the adults who work with gifted adolescents to scaffold their learning to allow them to work in their zone of proximal development in not only their academic growth but also their affective growth.

At the Chameleon school, Amy noted that the plan to share information is a work in progress and at the present time, the school counselor works to address relationship needs with all students in the school. There is nothing set up to address specific affective needs of gifted learners. Amy tries to advocate, but time constraints affect the opportunities she has to work with the students. These constraints appear to effect affective learning opportunities in a negative manner.

Gail plans to implement discussion groups at the high school level for ninth grade students with Advanced Learning Plans (ALPs) when time permits. Gail noted that, “since this is our first year in high schools, we’ve decided to concentrate on the incoming ninth grade students in order to build a foundation and work from there.” The groups will be based on the SENG Discussion Group model. Ryan noted that,

we are working on creating a system where more meetings related to gifted education are held within each school, but it has proven very difficult to get onto meeting calendars. Contract time is very precious and already has been gobbled up by a hodgepodge of other initiatives, so it is difficult to add new requirements that take teachers away from their planning time. (Ryan, Interview Session, 2016)

Time constraints appear to be a recurring theme as a barrier to provide affective learning opportunities, in terms of the answer to sub-question three. Although administrators and teachers may feel the issue of time is out of their control, I believe these adults can work to find flexible and suitable opportunities for students to engage in affective learning. The gifted education team is working to build these opportunities, with some positive results as reported by the teachers interviewed. The students at the Ram school have the opportunity to engage in discussion groups during lunch once a week. Gail hosts the lunch and facilitates the discussion group. Parents of the gifted adolescents take turns providing lunch for the 23 to 25 students who participate. Jean Peterson (2008) believes that guided discussion groups “give educators and counselors an opportunity to

interact with many gifted students about social and emotional development at one time, maximizing time and impact” (p. 1).

Gifted eighth-grade students at this school are clustered together for core classes and have a double period for ELA/Reading every Friday. This allows Gail to incorporate work with mentors to learn about values and perspectives. All of the students at this school are learning about intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. They also have the opportunity to engage in experiential learning experiences, including camping and a Washington D.C. trip. Ryan and Gail are supporting administrators to cluster group gifted students at the Ram school to allow time to incorporate affective learning opportunities.

Amy noted that there are some differing opinions regarding gifted students between the gifted education team and the administration at one of the schools, which makes it difficult to move forward with programming. The gifted teachers are able to meet with the students to write affective and academic goals, but the teachers are concerned that they do not have time to teach students about the topics prior to writing the goals.

The gifted team also offers professional development opportunities to the school staffs regarding gifted learners. There is collaboration within the gifted education team, but it does not necessarily transfer throughout the rest of the secondary schools. Ryan said that “within the team there is collaboration, but not necessarily with the individual

schools. The district GT team meets once a week for two hours to discuss programming and needs within the department.”

The level of collaboration and time given to the gifted teacher to work with students differs greatly from school to school at the secondary level. One school has students meet once a week for two hours, another school has gifted students meet every day for one period as a pullout class, and the gifted teacher pushes in at all of the other secondary schools. This is the first year for gifted teachers to have time allotted in the high school, so finding the best way to facilitate instruction for the gifted students is still in progress. The gifted education team is building capacity at the secondary level and working to align sixth through twelfth grade support.

Amy has been struggling with administrators and teachers that do not feel gifted students have specific affective needs. She said, “I am learning that different people have very different views of gifted education and what the students need.” She is hoping that through continued professional development, the educators she works with will shift their thinking.

The gifted education team is attempting to network with community members to enhance programming for gifted students. The Rams brought in two engineers to assist with robotics lessons. Although this collaboration is meant to assist with academic instruction, affective content can also be addressed as the students work with community members.

At the Ram school, all teachers have the same poster in their rooms explaining the schools mission statement regarding positive school culture. Some teachers choose to add other posters and artwork regarding positive relationships and community. Even in the same district, the support and understanding of affective development in gifted adolescents varies greatly. “Affective learning is a work in progress. I am working with the counselor to support the relationship piece,” said Amy.

Analysis of Themes in Relation to the ZPD Framework

In the data analysis, four themes emerged that supported the purpose of this study. As each theme emerged, I realized that a common thread in examining each theme was to utilize Lev Vygotsky’s Constructivist Learning Theory and the zone of proximal development (ZPD) (Daniels, 1996). Each theme will be discussed in relation to Vygotsky’s ZPD.

Figure 25

Themes



Theme 1 - Varied understanding and opinions regarding gifted students affects time and opportunity to work with gifted students at a secondary level.

Through the process of visiting four schools and talking with various educators, it became apparent that there are varied opinions as to the needs of gifted adolescents in regards to affective learning. Amy is working with an administrator that feels gifted adolescents do not have unique affective needs and should receive the same information as all other students. He follows the educational ideology of talent development and feels

gifted learners should only receive additional support in their area of strength. It is important for gifted learners to be supported within the realm of their strength area, but it is also imperative to support all aspects of the adolescent. If affective content is ignored, there can be devastating consequences.

Overtly discussing affective content allows gifted adolescents the opportunity to become aware of their own feelings as well as those of their peers. Peterson (2003) contests that...

It is important not to ignore the social and emotional concerns of gifted adolescents, not just to help them navigate typical and atypical developmental challenges, but also because some concerns may develop into significant maladies later...Gaining skills in articulating concerns and discovering commonalities with peers might be critical to sound mental health for individuals struggling with serious issues. However, what *all* gifted adolescents can gain from attention to affective concerns can enhance relationships and quality of life across the lifespan even to the benefit of gifted children not yet born. (p. 69)

As discussed in Chapter 2, research has strengthened our understanding of the gifted adolescent brain. From how gifted adolescents take in information through technology (Prensky, 2010), to reacting to situations in more intense ways (Daniels & Piechowski, 2009) researchers and those in academia have a better grasp of how to support gifted adolescents. It appears there is a disconnect between research and the general classroom teachers and administrators at the secondary level regarding the

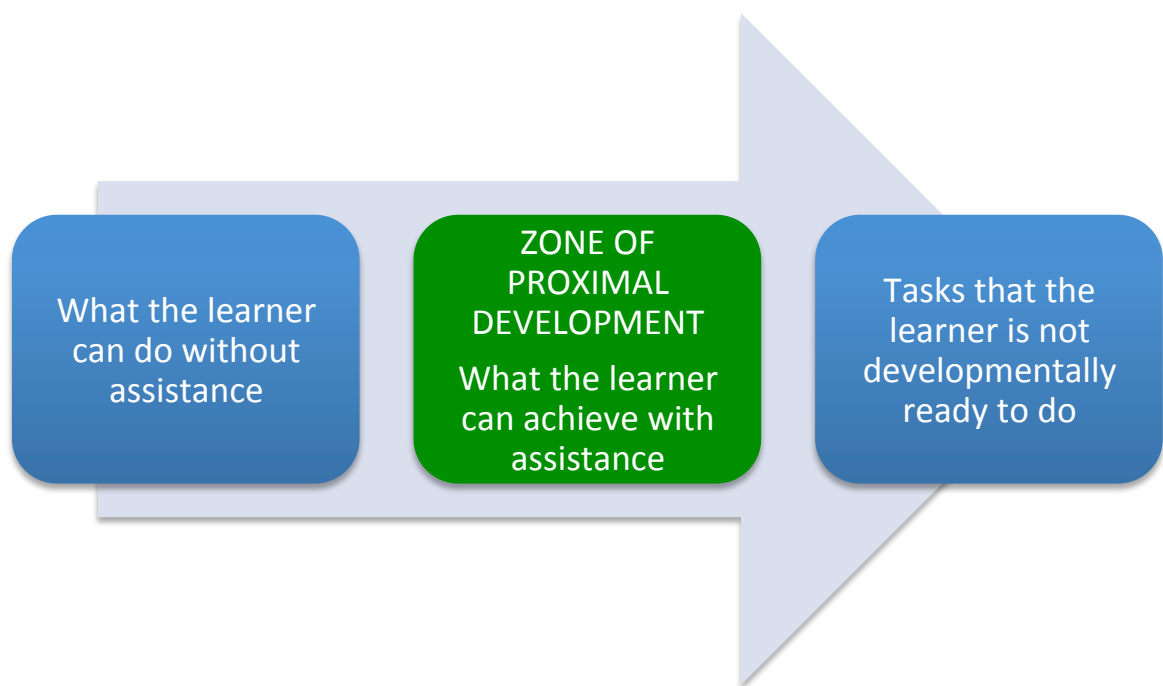
affective needs of gifted adolescents. When looking at this theme through the lens of Vygotsky's ZPD, it becomes apparent that educators and administrators need a stronger foundation in order to support their students. This could be accomplished through professional development opportunities, professional learning networks, or teacher and administrator preparation courses.

For the latter measures, Peterson (2003) explains that current teacher preparation course work may include a course that discusses "interpersonal issues related to giftedness, but may not offer strategies for addressing those concerns in programs" (p. 65). It is important for adults working with gifted adolescents to have a foundational understanding of their needs to support their learning experience. Gail noted that it can be difficult to support gifted adolescents in a setting "in which intelligence and performance are not particularly valued."

In the figure below, administrators and teachers without a strong understanding of affective needs would be in the first box and not quite working in their zone of proximal development.

Figure 3

Student Learning Continuum



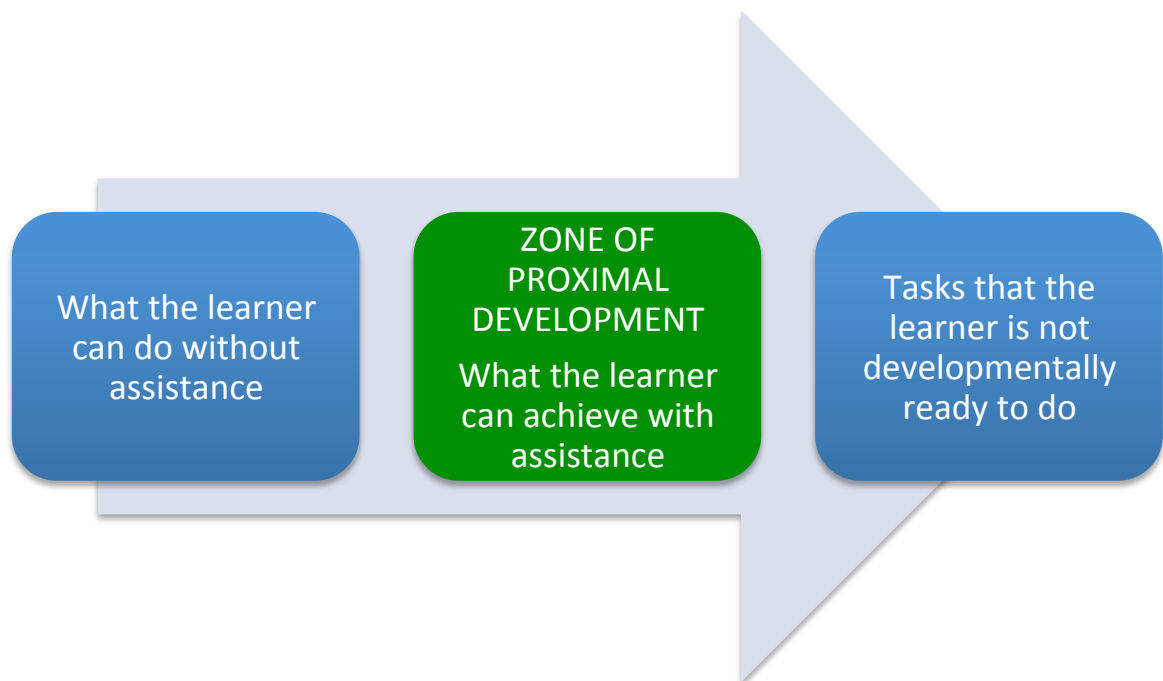
Theme 2 - Access to resources to address affective content with gifted adolescents.

All gifted teachers noted the difficulty to access resources. Gail explained that they “have to build all of their lessons from the ground up.” Gail and Amy both pull from their experience as school counselors to create learning experiences that incorporate affective content. At the district level, the gifted education team is working proactively to create affective learning opportunities. Ryan shared that the “district GT team meets once a week for two hours to discuss programming and needs within the department.”

Gail has been trained to use the SENG model of discussion groups with her students, but the other teachers need to become certified before they can use the materials. To allow teachers to work within their zone of proximal development, they need to have the appropriate resources and training. This in turn will enable gifted adolescents to work within their ZPD. Without building a foundation for the learning, the adolescents are asked to create an affective goal, which means they are working above their ZPD.

Figure 3

Student Learning Continuum



Theme 3 - Difficult to find the time to teach gifted adolescents about affective content.

I often hear teachers express concern in the area of having enough time to teach everything students need. Pressure to teach prescribed content and complete high stakes testing eats into the amount of time teachers have to work on other content. Amy was informed that she could only use the prescribed curriculum to address general affective content in one of her schools. This has made it difficult to attend to specific needs of her gifted adolescents regarding affective needs.

Elementary schools are set up to be more conducive to finding time for affective learning opportunities. In general, elementary students stay in the same room throughout the day, which allows counselors or interventionists to work with the class on a regular basis. Secondary schools do not have this opportunity, since the students change classes often and the students in each class vary continuously. A common frustration in secondary education is the lack of time and trained staff to provide this type of learning (Peterson, 2003; Tetreault, Haase, & Duncan, 2016).

Gail's 8th grade Rams are clustered and she is able to push in and work with them on Fridays during a reading/writing period. She has been able to incorporate some broad lessons within her work with her 8th grade students.

The teacher is open to me doing whatever, so this week they are working on an essay about mentors, values and stuff like that. I went in part way through the session and had a discussion about values and perspectives. I really pushed them

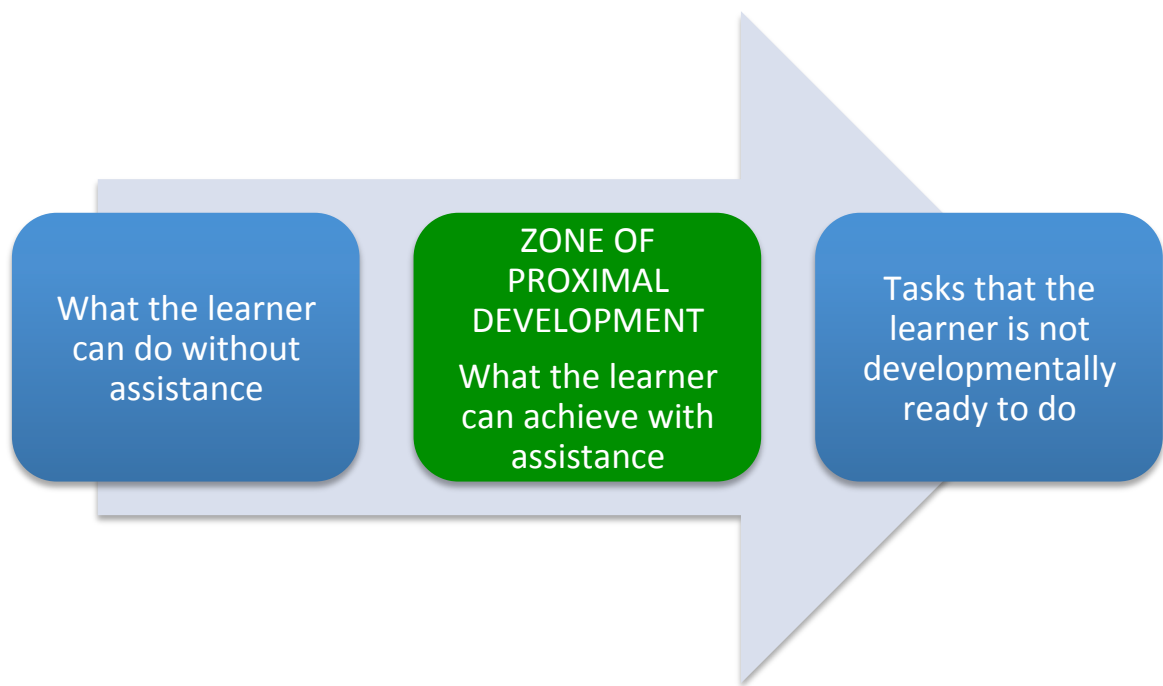
to take it to a deeper levels. We talked about values first and looked at values from their perspective, but also when people react to them and those people have an interpretation of what their values are. Then we talked about when you react to people, you're reacting to their interpretation of values, but you don't necessarily know what their values are, so how can you learn what their values are and understand better what conclusions you're jumping to, based on what you believe. Also, how do you present your thinking? You know what you want and why you're doing it, but other don't necessarily understand. They don't know where you're coming from and may hear things differently, especially if their value system is different. (Gail, Interview Session, 2016)

This type of activity allows the students to receive the affective content within the realm of academic lessons and helps alleviate some of the issues with time constraints. This also promotes the students' ability to be working in their ZPD because they are supported in the discussion of a topic that they are learning about while the teacher scaffolds their learning to go deeper.

Time comes into play when we are discussing goal setting as well. Goals are to be set at the beginning of the year and teachers often comment that they do not have adequate time to teach enough about various affective topics prior to goal setting (Colorado Department of Education, 2016). The student is then left to work above their ZPD as they create a goal because they do not have a foundation in the content.

Figure 3

Student Learning Continuum



Theme 4 - Positive school climate is mentioned at each school, but specific topics regarding affective learning, such as anxiety, perfectionism, and stress are not addressed in schools.

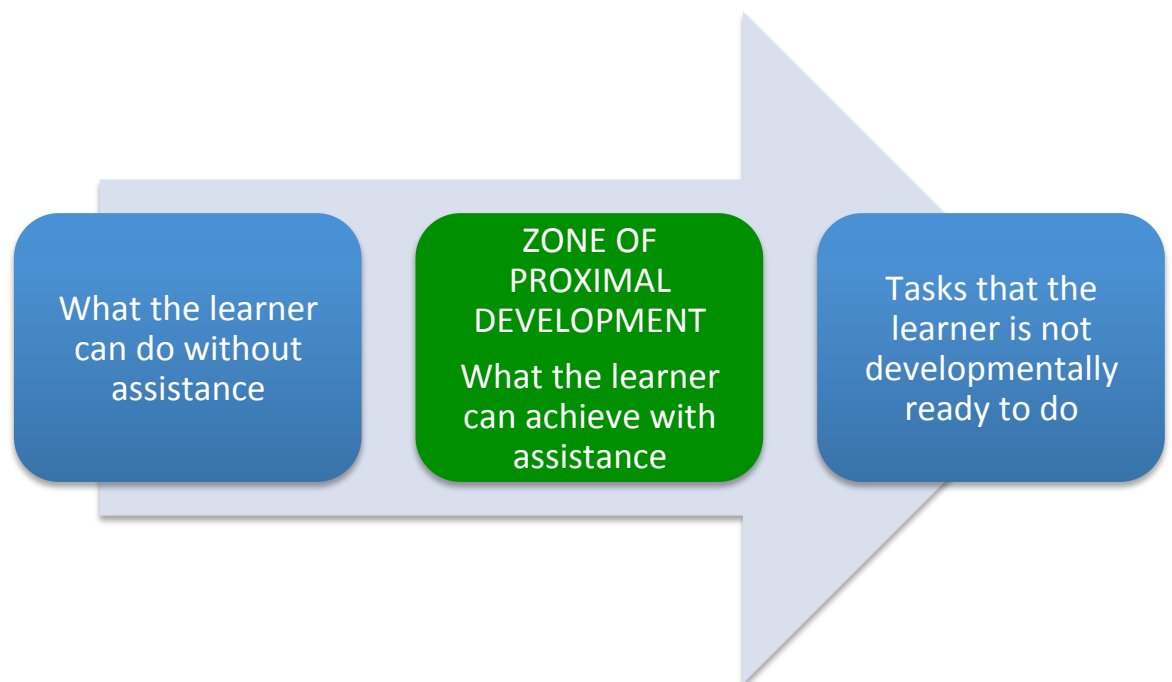
Although all schools had posters and information regarding positive school climate, each school varied greatly in the amount of visual information within their school. There were fewer artifacts in the high school than in the middle schools.

The relevance to ZPD is important with this theme. One way to build capacity in learners is by exposing them to relevant information. Exposure to material can act as a

scaffold for supporting affective learning. By utilizing artifacts throughout the school, the students are exposed to the information, even if it is not in an overt fashion. Artifacts often lend themselves to sparking discussions with peers or teachers, which can assist in helping the student to construct meaning. This is an important aspect of Vygotsky's Constructivist Learning Theory (Daniels, 1996).

Figure 3

Student Learning Continuum



Developing Positive Affective Learning Opportunities

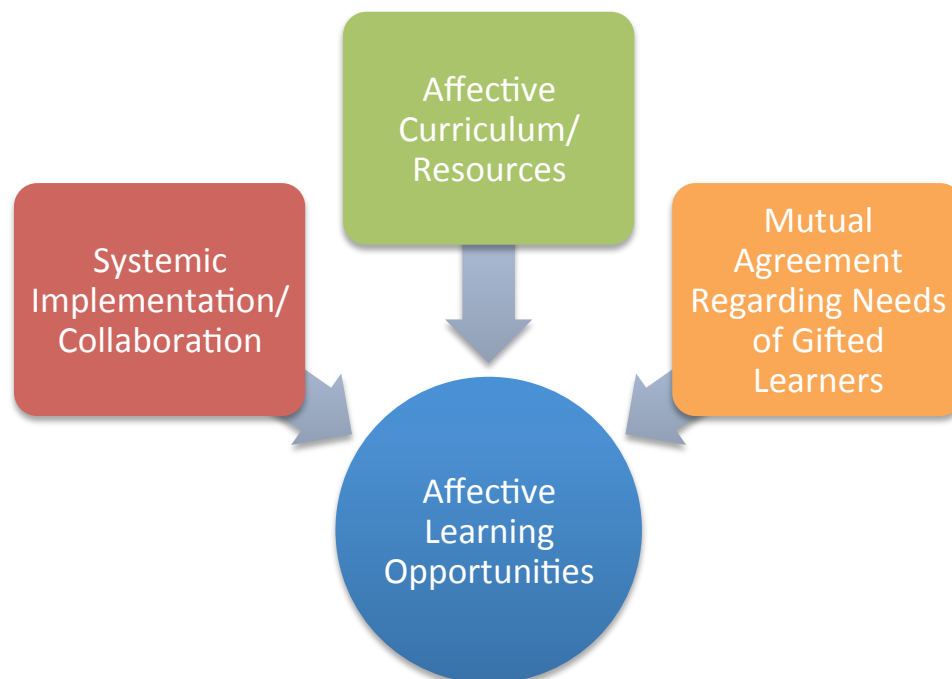
By utilizing the above themes, three aspects of positive affective learning opportunities arose. To create positive affective learning opportunities, the following three things must coalesce; (1) systemic implementation and collaboration, (2) mutual

agreement regarding the needs of gifted learners, and (3) strong affective curriculum and/or resources. A way to bring these three aspects to the forefront would be to offer continued professional development to educators and administrators, as well as teaching pre-service teachers about these issues prior to entering the classroom.

The following graphic displays how the themes of this study intersect to allow for productive affective learning opportunities. The following three attributes were found to be important pieces in the development of strong affective learning opportunities. Each attribute will be discussed in relation to this study and the literature.

Figure 26

**Developing Positive Affective Learning Opportunities for
Gifted Learners at the Secondary Level**



The three attributes found from this study to be important to the development of positive affective learning opportunities are systematic implementation/collaboration, affective curriculum/resources, and a mutual agreement regarding the needs of gifted learners. All of these factors can be strengthened by professional development provided to all stakeholders. Possible future studies related to these three aspects will be discussed later in this chapter.

Systemic Implementation and Collaboration

Prior to collaboration, it is important that two understandings are agreed upon with all stakeholders. First, all adults must have a common understanding as to what the gifted adolescents need in regards to affective learning. Second, the gifted adolescents should be part of the collaborative process.

The next step of this process would be to find out what the gifted adolescents feel about their affective learning opportunities. Their input must be included as plans are made so the process is meaningful for all students. It will be important to hear the student's voice. We need to know if having exposure to posters and visuals related to affective topics is enough to elicit thinking and metacognition.

Based on my professional experience, adults often provide a disservice to gifted adolescents by not addressing their affective needs, especially if the adolescent is performing well in the academic realm. "Gifted achievers and underachievers alike may also believe that their teachers, coaches, and even parents do not recognize their affective needs, emphasizing academic and talent development instead" (Peterson, 2003, p. 65).

Collaboration with educators and gifted adolescents may alleviate some of these situations and incorporating learning in which gifted adolescents can self-choose the topics they study may also help open the conversations with the adults in their lives.

Mutual Agreement Regarding Needs of Gifted Learners

Due to time constraints and varying adult opinions regarding needs of gifted students, each school offered different levels of affective learning opportunities. Some have a daily pullout class, while others get sporadic information shared with them once a situation arises. It is vital to keep lines of communication open with administrators, teachers, parents and gifted adolescents. Lisa Rivero (2010) found that:

Labels are easily misunderstood and stereotyped by others. What you or I mean by the term “gifted” might be very different from what someone else understands it to mean. For these and other reasons, many teens identified as gifted students choose not to use the label to define themselves. (p.12)

Moreover, many educators still do not understand the needs of gifted learners. Amy noted that “I deal with administrators on a regular basis that do not feel that gifted learners have different affective needs.” Professional development to build capacity in building leaders and staff needs to continue, so there is a greater understanding regarding needs of gifted learners, especially in terms of affective learning.

The misunderstanding may come from the contrasting educational ideologies discussed in Chapter 2. The emphasis on product-driven talent development or the child-perspective of personal growth have a great impact on educators’ views of gifted

education (Neville et al., 2013). “Caught in an educational culture that values only recognizable talents in specific domains, the unusually intelligent young person may lose track of other aspects of himself that are of critical importance of his developing identity” (Neville, et al., 2013, p. 5). Based on my experience, having more than one educational ideology causes confusion and frustration among administrators, educators and parents. The critical element is that gifted adolescents need affective development as well as intellectual development, perhaps the former even more so than the latter. However, the prevailing educational ideology appears to be focused on the gifted student’s academic development, even at the expense of affective development. Building a common understanding that will best support all gifted adolescents is therefore vital.

I commend the Rams for acknowledging that affective education is important for adolescents. It is imperative to continue professional development opportunities for educators to understand the unique needs of gifted adolescents and how to go deeper in the support of affective needs with these students. As noted above, such support is vital for these students’ overall growth and development.

As discussed in Chapter 2, the need for teachers to scaffold learning in all areas, including affective content, is important. In order for the students to achieve the highest level of understanding regarding a topic, they require teacher facilitation to work within their zone of proximal development. If teachers are not given the opportunity to work with students regarding their specific affective needs, the learning of the students will be at a much lower level.

Strong Affective Curriculum and/or Resources

An issue that arose was the lack of curricula for secondary students. All interviewees noted that it is difficult to find curriculum that teaches the secondary gifted students about affective content in the timeframe that the teachers have with the students. Ryan shared that:

The students are required to create an affective goal at the beginning of the year around an area they are dealing with, but they often don't even know what affective topics are. There is very little curriculum that we have found that fits into our schedule or fits with the needs of our students. We don't have a great way to share affective information at the moment. If they come up with a need, we will talk about it in class. If it's an individual need, I pass on the information. I use Jean Peterson's book, "Talk With Teens About Issues That Matter To Them," but it's difficult, there is just no good way. (Interview Session, 2016)

The ability to provide support for specific learning around affective content was inconsistent and appeared difficult. Resources were gathered independently by the gifted education team, which they noted was extremely time consuming.

Ryan, Gail, and Amy all mentioned the frustration they and the gifted adolescents feel when it is time to create affective goals at the beginning of the year. Lack of resources coupled with time constraints create a negative experience for many students. As noted earlier in the chapter, if the students do not have a foundation in affective

content, they will be working outside of their ZPD when attempting to create an affective goal for their ALP.

To effectively create and monitor an affective goal, gifted adolescents need to have some background knowledge and scaffolding regarding affective content. They should be able to learn about potential areas prior to goal setting. If they are to become self-teachers as noted by Prensky (2010), gifted adolescents need to have exposure to affective learning opportunities. This can only come about if a robust affective curriculum is offered. It will be important for future research to explore ways to help gifted adolescents obtain this knowledge in a manner that fits with their schedules and preferred modality of learning.

External factors such as time and adult perceptions impede affective learning opportunities at some of the schools. As noted in Chapter 2, adult perceptions regarding gifted learners affective needs differ in part because of two differing views of giftedness. Tolan and Piechowski note that “Talent development and personal growth are contrasting educational ideologies” and these ideologies can influence what type of instruction administrators feel the students should receive (Neville et al., 2013, p. 2).

Artifacts and interviews support that the Rams had the strongest acknowledgement of the need for secondary students to receive general affective learning. This is evident in the school wide initiative to increase social and emotional learning, as well as the student group created to heighten social and emotional awareness among the students. The Rams appeared to have the most awareness regarding affective

content for the overall population. They address the general topics of positive school culture and climate as well as honing in on communication and relationships among the entire student population and staff. The mission statement on the schools' homepage says, "Work Hard and Be Kind." It also says, "We believe that kids come first, that we are stronger working together than alone, that a smile and hello go a long way." The principal shared that the staff "worked to create this new mission and decided as a team that the emphasis for the year would be on building a positive school climate." In response to violent acts in schools, the topic of positive school climate and bullying is being addressed at the district and state levels. Since the school shooting at Columbine High School in 2001, districts have put more emphasis on positive school climate. The Colorado School Safety Resource Center, which is part of the Colorado Department of Public Safety, has created several documents to assist Colorado Schools in creating a positive school climate. One of the main resources shared with all schools is called the "Positive School Climate: Bullying and Harassment Prevention and Education Colorado School Resource Guide" (2016). This document shares ways for schools and districts to decipher what the needs are in their schools and resources to implement school wide protocols to improve school climate.

That being said, affective learning opportunities regarding specific needs of gifted adolescents were not present in the artifact analysis and limited in the curricular analysis. This could be because those educators and administrators responsible for artifact creation and presentation as well as curriculum design do not see the need to provide affective

learning opportunities specifically for gifted adolescents. The literature review suggests that just as gifted adolescents are often expected to perform academic tasks independently, they are also expected to deal with affective development by themselves or with little help. However, Dr. Tracy Cross, a leader in the field of gifted education, feels that “A proactive counseling program can be invaluable to gifted students. Learning about oneself and how to effectively relate to others in school can positively affect the psychological development of gifted students” (Cross, 2011, p. 81).

Cross’s statement can be related to the participating teachers’ claims that forming relationships with gifted students is crucial to fostering their affective development. In our society, individuals are revered if they have certain gifts. Intelligence is a common element that can be noted, but artistic, athletic and musical gifts are also highly regarded in our society. In recent years, it has come to light that without affective support, many adolescents with gifts will not be successful in our society because they struggle with intense affective characteristics. Through their research, Galbraith and Delisle (2015) have found that “underachievement is often more a symptom of a deeper set of concerns that can involve intellectual, social, and emotional areas of development, not simply academics” (p. 158). Understanding that supporting the affective needs of gifted learners is as important as supporting their strength area is a shift in thinking that needs to occur in our society.

The founder of SENG (Social and Emotional Needs of the Gifted), Dr. James Webb (2011) wrote:

It has been my experience that gifted and talented persons are more likely to experience a type of depression referred to as existential depression. Although an episode of existential depression may be precipitated in anyone by a major loss or the threat of a loss, which highlights the transient nature of life, persons of higher intellectual ability are more prone to experience existential depression spontaneously. (p. 1)

Sometimes this existential depression is tied into the positive disintegration experience referred to by Dabrowski (Daniels, 1996). Situations such as these are unique to gifted learners; being proactive and sharing tools and strategies with students will allow them to be in control of their understanding. “I am focusing on the bonding within the group of gifted adolescents and getting that created as a support group because intelligence and performance is not particularly valued in our school” (Gail, Interview Session, 2016). However, while Gail and the other teachers agree on this element of affective learning, it appears that their schools do not presently address it.

Analysis of School Missions

In chapter 1, I discussed my desire to see if there was a contrast between a school that presented with a strong academic objective and a school that presented with a strong affective focus. I wondered if having an academic focus would deter from offering affective support, especially to the gifted adolescents.

It was interesting to compare the two schools with affective mission statements. The Rams carried their mission statement through to the environment in the school. The

principal proudly shared the school plan to strengthen positive relationships and build community with students and staff. The Chameleons also had an affective mission, but did not appear to have a school wide plan to implement the work.

The Elephants and the Ducklings followed their mission statement to concentrate on academic excellence. Neither school had many artifacts or resources to address affective content. Each school had a few artifacts to share expectations within the school and positive school climate, but artifacts were few and far between. Although the mission statements were used only to select schools, I found it interesting to analyze the different schools in comparison to each other and the types of mission statements the schools share with their community.

Limitations of the Study

A limitation of this study was the difficulty in gaining access to schools and students. To allow for anonymity, I needed to be cautious as to which artifacts I shared and how I described the participants. Due to district policies, I was not able to work with the students directly. I feel that student input would strengthen the findings of this research and provide an important perspective.

It was also difficult because of the limited time I was able to spend in each school. As noted in Chapter Three, I spent 1 day visiting the schools. The schools are not located in my area, so extensive travel was necessary to access the sites. It would have been advantageous to travel to the schools multiple times throughout the year to see what might change in the schools over time. I was able to ascertain a snapshot of each school's

climate and examine artifacts and curriculum at each school, but without immersing myself in the school culture, I worry that I did not see all of the work being done around affective learning. I feel that it is important to continue working with the schools to have a deeper understanding. The interviews allowed more insight into the larger picture of what occurs throughout the year, which is why I am thankful that I chose to use triangulation in this case study.

Implications for Practice

This case study examined four secondary schools and the way in which they share information regarding affective content with their students. While the findings are not generalizable to the population, the lessons learned can be utilized to improve practice and awareness in secondary settings. This study shows that curricular resources are difficult to find for secondary students to learn about a variety of affective content. Amy, Gail and Ryan all noted that finding resources takes up a large chunk of their time and they often have to pull pieces together “on the fly.” Only two curricular resources, Jean Sunde Peterson’s books and SENG discussion group protocols, are being utilized on a regular basis. Tapping into the school counseling and social work background of the participants helps to create the remainder of the resources.

Schools appear to be working on positive school climate and students being kind to one another. Artifacts shared in Chapter 4 show that the schools are sharing information regarding positive school climate. The Ram’s principal noted the importance of affective education for all students. As shown in Figures 7 through 23, schools

displayed artifacts to bring awareness to general positive school climate. Areas such as self-awareness, relationships and communication were aspects of the artifacts at the Ram school. The Elephants, Chameleons and Ducklings offered very general information regarding good citizenship. Unfortunately, specific affective content (such as anxiety, perfectionism and depression) that can affect gifted students in a more intense way, are not systemically addressed in the schools. Students on Advanced Learning Plans (ALP) in Colorado are required to create a specific goal around an affective topic they would like to address. Without students having a foundation regarding affective topics they may be dealing with, it is difficult for them to write a goal to address it. As stated on the Colorado Department of Gifted Education website:

The Advanced Learning Plan (ALP) is a legal document [22-20-R-12.00, C.R.S.] outlining programming for identified gifted students and is used as a guide for educational planning and decision-making. The Exceptional Children's Educational Act states that there will be ALP content and procedures set in Rule for statewide implementation; and that goals in the ALP are standards-based. Sections 12.02(2)(f) – 12.02(2)(g)(vi) of the Rules clarify ALP content, procedures and responsibilities. For high school students the ALP may be blended with an Individual Career and Academic Plan (ICAP) if all contents of the ALP are inclusive in the ICAP, including achievement and **affective goals**. (<https://www.cde.state.co.us/gt/alp>)

Since the above law incorporates students creating affective goals, it is imperative for students to receive affective learning opportunities. The goals should be aligned with CDE and/or NAGC standards, which were shared in Chapter 2. It will be important to find out if other secondary schools and districts are finding it difficult to provide learning opportunities for gifted learners regarding affective content.

Vygotsky's Constructivist Learning Theory is important to take into account at this juncture. As stated in Chapter 2, a student's zone of proximal development is defined as the area of learning in which a student is challenged, yet not overwhelmed by the content (Daniels, 1996). To enable learning in the gifted adolescent's zone of proximal development, students will need guidance and scaffolding to maximize the level of attainment they can achieve. The curricula that educators create, the environment they present to the students, the artifacts they create and present, and the relationships they build and maintain with students all should be done with the ZPD concept in mind. The gifted student should have his/her needs met but should not be overwhelmed by efforts to do so (Daniels, 1996).

Implications for Future Research

This study investigated what is currently available in participating secondary schools regarding affective learning opportunities. Daniel Goleman notes, "if your emotional abilities aren't in hand, if you don't have self-awareness, if you are not able to manage your distressing emotions, if you can't have empathy and have effective

relationships, then no matter how smart you are, you are not going to get very far” (Culture of Empathy, 2017).

It was assumed that if someone is presented with a stimulus, such as an artifact regarding affective content, it will elicit thinking, even for a short moment about how that issue relates to him/her. An example of an activity that many professional developers utilize with adult learners to illicit metacognitive thinking is the True Color Test. Some adults feel that this activity is an unnecessary use of time, but when the underlying meaning of the activity is explained, there is a collective “a-ha moment.” As participants answer questions regarding themselves, they are consciously or unconsciously examining themselves and how they respond to others, even for a short time. As a professional developer, this was my true intention of such activities and I found that it increased self-awareness in participants. The reason I believe artifacts are beneficial in enhancing affective learning in gifted adolescents is that information or activities that enlighten and stimulate gifted adolescents regarding how their brain responds to situations sparks metacognition. This is an area that should be considered in future research. It would be informative to find out if students feel that lack of artifacts deter healthy affective development.

Ryan questioned if having artifacts in the hallways and classrooms is important to the secondary students. Does exposure to artifacts regarding affective content trigger metacognition related to the topics? If so, how would we measure the results? This would be an important facet for future research. Also, it was difficult to know what each

individual teacher was sharing regarding affective learning throughout the day. It will be important to find out from the students what their feelings are toward affective learning opportunities.

Future research could also examine available secondary affective curricula available on the market. This might shed some light on whether there is a true lack of resources or a lack of awareness regarding where to locate the appropriate resources. It would also be interesting to expand the study to multiple districts.

Conclusion

As future research is explored, gifted adolescents should be given affective learning opportunities in platforms that offer flexibility and differentiation. The world is changing at a rapid pace. With the tremendous amount of information constantly streaming into gifted adolescents' minds, it is imperative that educators understand that gifted adolescents need scaffolding to navigate their affective growth. As Ryan pointed out, "Dealing with social and emotional needs is a challenge, and trying to find the time and curriculum that interests all participants in a given class can be incredibly difficult." By offering affective learning opportunities that are differentiated, individuals could access the information that is pertinent to them. It will be important to find out what the students feel is important for them to have available as they learn. It might be difficult for the students to explain if they don't understand what affective content includes.

There may not be one ideal curriculum for gifted adolescents to understand affective content. Every gifted adolescent has different needs, but the consistent need

across all adolescents is the need to expose them to the information. Gifted educators must be the catalyst for change at the school level for gifted adolescents to receive appropriate affective learning opportunities. Not only do gifted educators need to provide affective learning opportunities for gifted adolescents, but they must help build capacity within administrators and other educators regarding the unique needs of gifted adolescents.

Gifted adolescents need the opportunity to understand what is happening to their minds and bodies due to the way their brains process information. “Gifted and talented students need to learn how to accept their strengths and weaknesses, deal with personal characteristics, such as sensitivity and perfectionism, and to communicate and cooperate with others” (Johnson, 2001, p. 16). Gifted adolescents need to understand that they are cared for and understood, whether that is from a custodian saying hello in the hallway or a support group that meets during lunch once a week. As Aristotle said, “Knowing yourself is the beginning of all wisdom.”

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Appendix A



2010 Pre-K-Grade 12 Gifted Programming Standards

Gifted Education Programming Standard 1: Learning and Development

Introduction

For teachers and other educators in PreK-12 settings to be effective in working with learners with gifts and talents, they must understand the characteristics and needs of the population for whom they are planning curriculum, instruction, assessment, programs, and services. These characteristics provide the rationale for differentiation in programs, grouping, and services for this population and are translated into appropriate differentiation choices made at curricular and program levels in schools and school districts. While cognitive growth is important in such programs, affective development is also necessary. Thus many of the characteristics addressed in this standard emphasize affective development linked to self-understanding and social awareness.




Standard 1: Learning and Development

Description: Educators, recognizing the learning and developmental differences of students with gifts and talents, promote ongoing self-understanding, awareness of their needs, and cognitive and affective growth of these students in school, home, and community settings to ensure specific student outcomes.

Student Outcomes	Evidence-Based Practices
1.1. Self-Understanding. Students with gifts and talents demonstrate self-knowledge with respect to their interests, strengths, identities, and needs in socio-emotional development and in intellectual, academic, creative, leadership, and artistic domains.	1.1.1. Educators engage students with gifts and talents in identifying interests, strengths, and gifts. 1.1.2. Educators assist students with gifts and talents in developing identities supportive of achievement.
1.2. Self-Understanding. Students with gifts and talents possess a developmentally appropriate understanding of how they learn and grow; they recognize the influences of their beliefs, traditions, and values on their learning and behavior.	1.2.1. Educators develop activities that match each student's developmental level and culture-based learning needs.
1.3. Self-Understanding. Students with gifts and talents demonstrate understanding of and respect for similarities and differences between themselves and their peer group and others in the general population.	1.3.1. Educators provide a variety of research-based grouping practices for students with gifts and talents that allow them to interact with individuals of various gifts, talents, abilities, and strengths. 1.3.2. Educators model respect for individuals with diverse abilities, strengths, and goals.
1.4. Awareness of Needs. Students with gifts and talents access resources from the community to support cognitive and affective needs, including social interactions with others having similar interests and abilities or experiences, including same-age peers and mentors or experts.	1.4.1. Educators provide role models (e.g., through mentors, bibliotherapy) for students with gifts and talents that match their abilities and interests. 1.4.2. Educators identify out-of-school learning opportunities that match students' abilities and interests.
1.5. Awareness of Needs. Students' families and communities understand similarities and differences with respect to the development and characteristics of advanced and typical learners and support students with gifts and talents' needs.	1.5.1. Educators collaborate with families in accessing resources to develop their child's talents.
1.6. Cognitive and Affective Growth. Students with gifts and talents benefit from meaningful and challenging learning activities addressing their unique characteristics and needs.	1.6.1. Educators design interventions for students to develop cognitive and affective growth that is based on research of effective practices. 1.6.2. Educators develop specialized intervention services for students with gifts and talents who are underachieving and are now learning and developing their talents.
1.7. Cognitive and Affective Growth. Students with gifts and talents recognize their preferred approaches to learning and expand their repertoire.	1.7.1. Teachers enable students to identify their preferred approaches to learning, accommodate these preferences, and expand them.
1.8. Cognitive and Affective Growth. Students with gifts and talents identify future career goals that match their talents and abilities and resources needed to meet those goals (e.g., higher education opportunities, mentors, financial support).	1.8.1. Educators provide students with college and career guidance that is consistent with their strengths. 1.8.2. Teachers and counselors implement a curriculum scope and sequence that contains person/social awareness and adjustment, academic planning, and vocational and career awareness.

Appendix B

Affective SMART Goal Worksheet

Student Affective Goal(s)					
Student Name:	Date:	Grade:	Improve affective strength <input type="checkbox"/>	Investigate & prepare for college & career <input type="checkbox"/>	Modify or eliminate impediments <input type="checkbox"/>
Target:					
Standard/outcomes:					
Type of Programming & Measurement					
Learning Experience:			Measurement:		
Program or Model:			Measurement:		
Intervention:			Measurement:		
Behavior Modification:			Measurement:		
SMART Goal:			 <div> <p>S</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Standards-based Specific Strategic <p>M</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Measurable Meaningful <p>A</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attainable Appropriate Achievable <p>R</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Realistic Rigorous Relevant <p>T</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Timely Tangible Targeted </div>		

Appendix C

Interview Questions

- 1.** What is the number one factor that contributes to healthy affective development?
- 2.** How do you share information regarding affective issues with your gifted adolescent students (students on Advanced Learning Plans)?
- 3.** How do you find resources regarding affective issues to share with gifted adolescents?
- 4.** Is there a school wide or district wide plan/curriculum for teaching affective issues at the secondary level?
- 5.** What is your background in teaching affective topics to gifted adolescents?
- 6.** Is there collaboration between adults in the building or district regarding how to share information regarding affective issues with gifted adolescents?

Appendix D

Community Partner Agreement:

The purpose of this project is to research a problem in practice. The research project is associated with the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED_ completed through the University of Denver. This agreement is to communicate that the researcher's work will support the community partner and their area of need. The researcher will communicate all findings with the community partner. For this particular study, the researcher will do observations at secondary school sites in [REDACTED] School District.

Researcher:

1. Jessica Howard – Doctoral Candidate

Signature: Jessica Howard

Community Partner:

[REDACTED] School District

(Represented by [REDACTED] Secondary Director of Curriculum)

Signature: [REDACTED]